





84/05.ee.22

R E M A R K S
ON THE
FRENCH AND ENGLISH
L A D I E S,
IN A
SERIES OF LETTERS;
INTERSPERSED
WITH VARIOUS ANECDOTES,
AND
ADDITIONAL MATTER,
ARISING FROM THE SUBJECT.

BY JOHN ANDREWS, LL.D.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR T. LONGMAN, AND G. ROBINSON,
PATERNOSTER-ROW.

M.DCC.LXXIII.

REMARKS

on the

FRENCH AND ENGLISH

LAID

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS

INTERESTED

WITH



ADDITIONAL MATTER

ARISING FROM THE SUBJECT

BY JOHN ANDREWS, LL.D.

LONDON

PRINTED FOR T. BONDMAN, AND G. ROBINSON,
PATERNOSTER-HOUSE.

MDCCCXXXIII

R E M A R K S

ON THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH L A D I E S.

L E T T E R I.

*On the polite Disposition and Affability of the
French Ladies---their Persons in general---
Sprightliness---Conversation---Deportment.*

IN Compliance with your request, I send you my thoughts and observations on the women of this country. It is an easier task to write or speak about them, than of those of any other; as they are far from being difficult of access, and very ready to bestow their company, where they can do it with propriety.

Whoever is possess of a reputable character, and recommended by persons of known rank and credit, may with facility procure himself an

introduction to their society, and if his behaviour is genteel and becoming, will never fail to meet with due notice and respect.

Politeness and easy manners are the infallible passport to secure an agreeable familiar footing among them. To individuals of this description their doors are ever open. A man of gay and fashionable address is always a welcome guest among the French ladies; they will admit him at all times, permit him to associate with them in public places, enter cheerfully into conversation with him; and, in short, refuse none of those tokens of complaisance that good breeding establishes reciprocally between acquaintance.

A particularity that strikes most foreigners, the English more than any others, is, that notwithstanding they are usually far from amiable in their undress, yet they are not in the least averse to shew themselves in that disadvantageous situation, and of meeting the eyes even of those admirers, with whose homage they are most delighted.

The first coup d'oeil seldom prepossesses in favour of their persons, but the charms of their behaviour soon efface this defect. Nature, it is true, has generally taken too little pains with their

their outside, and beauty is on account of its rarity, no trifling advantage in France: but then its absence is amply supplied by those innumerable graces, that commonly take a much faster hold, and make a much more lasting impression on the hearts of men.

Their address is quite easy and unaffected. Though one may perceive it is the effect of education, yet art has been so well worn away by the habits contracted through continual exercise, that politeness may in them be truly called second nature.

Accustomed in their own country to simplicity and plainness, the generality of foreigners are not less surprised than charmed with that gracefulness in their deportment, which is perceptible at first sight.

Neither can they be less captivated by the facility with which they acquit themselves in the various scenes of polite intercourse.

While in some parts of the world, even such as esteem themselves the most refined and civilized, these frequently degenerate into mere tedious formalities, and abridge not a little the pleasures of society; the French women have the art of conducting them with an air of

sprightliness that adds to the good humour of the company.

Thus far all is agreeable and prepossessing; but, on a closer inspection, we may not altogether be equally pleased.

The preposterous custom of rather plaistering than painting their faces, is universally prevalent among the women of fashion in France. Such as imitate them in England, do it far more judiciously.

The restless vivacity of the young and gay women among the French is as remarkable; it puts them in perpetual motion, and hardly allows a moment of pause and interval between the changes of attitude, that shew them incessantly in a different light. Horace's *vultus nimium lubricus aspici*, a face too slippery to behold, is perfectly applicable to them in these instances.

There are two objects, of which the French ladies are peculiarly solicitous to make a display, their eyes and teeth: in the brilliancy of the first, and the whiteness of the last, they think no women can surpass, if equal them.

Of

Of late years, however, the English women are become more careful of their teeth than they were used to be; the soft and tender cast of their eye is proverbial among foreigners, and what principally enchants them.

Baron Pollnitz, who was not only a great traveller, but a prying observer of what fell under his cognizance, expresses himself in a most feeling manner touching the English women: he dwells in a peculiar manner on their native softness and modesty; and, above all, on their kind and loving aspect, of which he describes the power and the impression it made upon him in the most forcible language.

They who ascribe superior lustre and beauty to a French woman's eyes, observe, that what constitutes the merit of them, is not so much their make and colour, as the life and poignancy they convey to their discourses; their looks strongly denote their meaning, and are like a text, upon which few words are wanting to make a commentary.

They, on the other hand, who prefer that innocence and reserve in their countenance, as well as in their behaviour, for which our English women are generally celebrated, object to that poignancy in the eyes, and meaning in the

looks of the French women. In their opinion, it favours of boldness, and argues an oblivion of that delicacy and decorum in appearance and in manners, which are equally the glory and the safeguard of womankind,

The perpetual mixture of company in France, where women are of all parties, inures them to a degree of sagacity and penetration not inferior to that of men, even in such things as belong to the latter.

Their conversation is very commonly not more entertaining, from the natural engagingness and blandishments peculiar to the sex, than from the capacity many of them have arrived at through long use and observation, of speaking pertinently on a diversity of subjects.

As women have a much greater portion of native eloquence than men, the French ladies have consequently a larger share than the women of other nations, from their everlasting practice of it.

Though their volubility of tongue is indefatigable, the variety they throw into their discourses, and the prodigious sprightliness that animates them, almost prevents the perception of this general failing of the sex.

If

If persuasion be the end, as well as the proof of eloquence, they most indubitably merit the prize; they are so alluring, so fraught with the arts of insinuation, that it is hard to withstand them, whenever they undertake to win our assent.

It is with great justice, however, that we set a much higher value on the openness and unartful sincerity of our own countrywomen, whose candour and good sense need no varnish, and whose beauty, heightened by unfeigned modesty, renders them far more captivating and persuasive than all the powers of eloquence can render any women that are divested of those endowments.

On his first arrival in France, a young Englishman is apt to take but little notice of the women of that country, when he revolves in his mind how different the persons he meets with are from those he has left at home, and compares at the same time the artifice and cunning that are discoverable through the veil of finished breeding, with the ingenuousness and candour in words and behaviour, that characterize the fair sex of our island.

But the case is quickly altered, after his introduction to the more intimate acquaintance of the French ladies. Notwithstanding his

former devotion to the genuine charms of pure nature, he soon becomes a victim to the enticements of art.

The seduction and conquest of young men is no difficult matter, when attempted by the wiles and allurements of agreeable women; and it is always the surer for being gradual and less perceptible.

LETTER II.

On the Attention and Conduct of the French and English Ladies respecting their Children.

I HAVE heard it sometimes disputed, which of the two are fondest of their children, whether the ladies of France, or those of England.

The question might, it should seem, be soon resolved, by observing which of the two are the most addicted to pleasures and pastimes abroad, and which are most inclined to domestic enjoyments and occupations.

Without enquiring into the nature and propriety of the different methods of spending time, respectively pursued by the fashionable fair in either country, suffice it to observe, that the English ladies are, in general, more domestic than the French; that is to say, they are more attentive to the care of their household affairs, they look more narrowly into the management of their family concerns, and seem more willing on the whole to be conversant in these matters.

In

In consequence of such a disposition it may naturally be presumed, that their children will partake of this solicitude, and will of course experience a proportionably larger share of maternal attention than the children of French ladies, who do not profess so much attachment to their homes, nor consequently to what is transacted there.

The truth is, that affection to their kindred is the great stimulus with the English women; whereas ambition is the ruling motive that actuates the French: the concerns of infancy seem to engross the former, the prospects belonging to maturity take up the cares and employment of the latter.

The French women of high rank are particularly fond of assuming the direction and superintendence of their children, in regard to their future destination in life; their wishes, their endeavours all tend to this point.

To do them justice, they are examples of the most effectual activity in the pursuit of those schemes of grandeur, which their fertile imaginations teem with for the benefit of their offspring.

The

The national principles and prejudices so long established in France, influence the women as much as they do the men. As the military and the ecclesiastical are the only professions held honourable in France, a French lady disdains to cast her thoughts on any other, in reference to her progeny ; she employs herself in speculating with the most acute nicety, by what methods she can successfully dispose of her little family into either of these vocations ; with equal sedulousness and skill forming the plans which are to be conducive to this purpose, and beginning betimes to carry them into execution.

Impelled by these cogent motives, a French lady enters upon this agreeable career, with all the warmth and vivacity of her sex and nation. Her activity is perpetually on the wing ; she sets all her engines to work ; and, through dint of her consummate expertness in the arts of solicitation and intrigue, she obtains benefices (that is sinecure livings) for some, and commissions for others,

One may infer from this, that an early initiation into the church or the army, is very common in France, where it is usual to behold rich dignitaries and officers of note in the persons of young lads, and sometimes of children in petticoats.

This,

This, you may well imagine, must prove highly scandalous and disgusting to the serious part of the clergy, as well as to the unpromoted veterans of the army ; but in this country, more than in any other, the proverb holds good, that those who win may laugh.

Such is the interest and the influence of the grantees of this kingdom, that notwithstanding the nation at large is continually expressing its discontent and indignation at the treatment of some of its worthiest members, they are still sentenced to remain unprovided, and little better than literally starving, while meer children are seated in their places, and enjoying those rewards, to obtain which the labours and merits of a whole life are daily pleaded in vain.

It is chiefly in purposes of this tendency that a French lady exerts her abilities, and displays her attention for the welfare of her little ones. But, without incurring the imputation of severity, it may be asserted, that in all this she is chiefly stimulated by ambition ; or, at least, as much intent on the splendour and aggrandizement she expects to derive from the success of her exertions, as on the personal happiness of her posterity.

If

If one may judge of the superiority of maternal tenderness by that which seems to be the strongest proof—attention to infancy, one would be apt to decide in favour of the English women. They most certainly appear fonder of their infant progeny, and more solicitous in what relates to that helpless situation of our nature, than the French. Few of these are willing to undergo the labour of suckling their children, in comparison of the number of English women, whose circumstances, if they chose it, might exempt them from that trouble.

LETTER—III.

On the literary Accomplishments of the French Ladies—Ideas of the French in general on the Wit and Genius of the English.

CONSIDERABLE numbers of the French ladies addict themselves to literature; to this all who have had frequent admittance into polite companies in France, will readily yield testimony.

Several indeed have affected to be conversant in the abstruse sciences, such as mathematics and experimental philosophy.

The celebrated Marquise du Chatelet, so highly extolled in the writings of Voltaire, was a remarkable instance of female proficiency in the most difficult and arduous parts of human knowledge.

Others might be mentioned of great eminence in the same line, if such eminence be worth a woman's wishes.

But

But those branches of knowledge and literature wherein many of them may really be said to shine, are that portion of ethics which is applicable to the practical part of life; and was best understood by those who have produced such writings as the *Spectators*, *Guardians*, and others in that stile.

These the French are impartial enough to consider as the standards and models of all substantial and useful instruction.

It is principally on the strength of these excellent performances, that Voltaire pays the English nation the noble compliment of deserving to be *les precepteurs du genre humain*, 'the preceptors of mankind.'

Compositions of moral wit and ingenuity, such as *Rochefoucaut*, and *Bruiere*, the French seem capitally to delight in; they hit exactly their disposition, quick, lively, and charmed with that chiefly which does not require too profound and tiresome an investigation.

Neither are they less pleased with performances in the strain of *Le Diable Boiteux* and *Gil Blas*, which are the more admired and praised, as they describe such scenes as sink deepest of any into their attention, from the

con-

congeniality and similitude of most of the imaginary actors and passages to realities well known among the French. They place incomparably more value on those productions that paint life and manners, than upon any others; and affirm that such births of fancy do greater honour to a nation, and evince its genius and invention, much more than elaborate speculations.

Notwithstanding our philosophers and deep writers are excellently translated, and much read and studied among the learned in France, yet the generality of the French allow us more credit for, as they certainly bestow much more of their attention upon Tom Jones, Sir Charles Grandison, and other productions of that kind.

These they frankly confess have introduced among them a more favourable opinion of the elegance and refinement of our understanding, and the rectitude and delicacy of our taste and ideas, than all the preceding labours of our greatest geniuses. They could not indeed refuse to these the applause and admiration justly due to the sublime extent of their capacities; but they did not admit their works to be sufficient proofs of our possessing an equal talent with themselves, in feeling and describing the finer emotions of nature, and following it in the
 closest

closest recesses, and most complicate windings of the human heart and mind.

As indeed no people display, so none esteem in a higher degree than the French, the talent of distinguishing with nicety and precision, the various operations of the faculties and passions that compose our intellectual system, and of discerning their reciprocal influence upon, and conflict with each other, throughout the divers passages of life.

This, when elucidated by an ingenious fiction, founded on incidents equally probable and interesting, the French, not without reason perhaps, hold the most curious and instructive, as well as the most pleasing of all liberal entertainments.

From the perusal of works of this class, which abound in France, and are generally very well written, the women who aspire at a name, are very studious to form their stile.

A circle of well educated French ladies, may not unfitly be deemed a bench of decision on literary merit. From these assemblies verdicts of approbation or censure, are issued on all *ouvrages de gout*, works of taste, that is, on all subjects that are susceptible of the embellish-

ments of imagination, or of stile. These the ladies have appropriated to themselves, as a province to the ruling of which they deem their capacities fully adequate.

In order however to give more weight to the judicial authority they have thus assumed, and to render it not unworthy of the respect which they claim in its favour from the public, they have taken care to provide themselves with assistants and coadjutors in this supreme court.

These assessors, if they may be so termed, are usually selected among those gentlemen, so celebrated throughout France under the denomination of Abbés. Numbers of them, for their ingenuity, and upon many other accounts, have the honour of being most intimately allied with the ladies.

Thus united, they form a tribunal, of which the decisions have no small influence in France; where the opinions of the enlightened part of the fair sex, are allowed a credit and consequence which they possess not elsewhere in so flattering a degree.

In most of the houses of these learned ladies are stated cotteries, to which always belong

long one or more of these gentlemen; who may not unaptly be compared to the *Chasseurs* in the modern, and the *Velites* in ancient armies: their duty being to hunt out and discover whatever the busy pens of the literati are employed in.

Of these, while in embryo, they must, if they mean to shine in their station, have the sagacity to hint the future worth or demerit, by that sort of penetration which we will hazard to call second-sight.

This anticipation of things completely establishes their character, as men whose forecast and vigilance nothing can escape.

The French are as proud of earning this character by labouring in the *Operose nihil*, making much ado about nothing, as by exerting their activity in affairs of the most serious importance.

When this embryo is ripened into its intended proportions, and has been launched into the world to try its fortune, then comes on the critical time of action, then all their faculties are summoned and set to work *pour l'eplucher*, to examine and discuss it piece meal, in order to lay their notions of the matter before their female-

associates. These are always complaisant enough to form their judgment of it, partly on the antecedent determination of their industrious co-operators in office; who like the dissectors in a meeting of anatomists, prepare the subject on which the ladies are, in a manner, to read lectures.

Much of all this you will readily understand, is caricature; yet it cannot be denied that many French ladies exhibit strong lines of resemblance to this description of their character.

LETTER IV.

On the Taste and Amusements of the French Ladies in the last Century.—On Punning.

NOTWITHSTANDING the latter part of my last letter, was in some measure, ludicrous and hyperbolic; yet it is not altogether fictitious and groundless.

The picture I drew was like those we often see of battles, which the painters take the liberty of representing with every concomitance of horror they can recollect.

In the same manner I thought proper to present you with the various particulars, which I had ever seen or heard, relative to what passes in the meetings of the learned ladies in this country.

Certain it is, that whatever eccentricities they may sometimes fall into, or whatever freedoms they may deem themselves intitled to assume on these occasions, they are both entirely harmless; and always attended with a po-

liteness and liberality of sentiment, that render these assemblies extremely entertaining.

To sum up the whole of what may be said on this subject, these literary discussions among the ladies, and those gentlemen who who are fond of being of their parties, are of admirable service in polishing and refining, in the highest degree, the understanding of both sexes. Viewed in the light of a recreation, they appear the most pleasing methods, not of passing time, (which would be an expression far beneath the merit of the meaning) but of employing it to an edifying and laudable purpose.

It may not be amiss to take notice, that they took their rise during the regency of Ann, queen dowager of Lewis XIII. and mother of Lewis XIV.

That illustrious princess introduced the custom of holding assemblies regularly in the evening, in order to unbend the mind by agreeable conversations, after the fatigue of the day.

In these assemblies the sallies of wit and genius were peculiarly welcome, and usually made the principal share of the entertainment, through
the

the countenance and favourable reception they met with from her.

As she was a woman of uncommon sprightliness, and tinctured with the notions arising from that spirit of gallantry so current in Spain, her native country, she gave no small encouragement to the progress of it in France.

Hence arose those voluminous compilations of strange and marvellous adventures, which mark so precisely and forcibly the taste of that age; and, in numerous instances, did not a little influence the manners of the times.

They abounded accordingly in men of the most enterprising and daring disposition; not unlike such heroes as figure in romances and fabulous records.

Such were for instance a duke of Guise, who aspired to be a king; and even a Condè, whose boundless designs were hardly known to himself: to say nothing of the many celebrated names that were coeval with them, and that contributed by their wild ambition, to the confusions which were agitating almost every part of Europe.

But setting aside the excesses of a luxuriant imagination, the taste of that famous queen was delicate and refined. She perfectly understood true wit and polite intercourse, and forwarded the cultivation of both, in a degree that proved highly serviceable to the interest and reputation of the fair sex. Their aptitude for improvement in so advantageous a school was quickly perceived, and soon spread over all France, an acceptable imitation of so illustrious a precedent,

In the following period (the reign of her son Lewis the fourteenth) the foundation she had laid, met with an ample superstructure in the countenance which that prince was ever fond of shewing to the ladies.

Their intellectual merit became of course conspicuous, and attracted the most distinguished predilection : witness a Montespan, who possessed his heart in quality of a mistress ; and a Maintenon, who held it by the more honourable tenure of a wife. Both of them were women of prime-rate understanding ; and not more accomplished in the arts of endearing themselves to men by the charms of their conversation, than of captivating their minds by the elegance of their writing,

During

During that æra, the spirit of literature and knowledge grew so powerful among woman kind, as to be sometimes carried to a degree of excess highly blameable and ridiculous.

This was remarkably instanced in those well-known conferences, held in the presence of the Duchess of Longueville; who devoted her latter days to high-flown studies of mystic theology, to atone, as it were, for having spent her youth in faction and intrigue.

There was, however, in her case, some share of merit. The men she admitted to her confidence and intimacy, were the disciples formed under the tuition of those masterly teachers who presided at Port Royal, once a seminary of the most consummate genius and learning, as the great names of Nicole, Arnaud, Pascal, and others, abundantly testify.

But without entering into the recesses of devotees secluded from the fashionable world, we shall find a sufficient number of females, who diverted it by their extravagancies in the department of literature.

Their frequent appearance in the community excited the animadversion of Moliere, whose satirical comedies of the *Femmes Savantes*, and *Precieuses*

Precieuses Ridicules, drew so faithful and striking a portrait of that species of foible, that a general correction was almost instantaneously effected by them.

Since that epocha, the French women of fashion have usually taken care to ally an application to the genteel branches of literature, with a restraint on the unnecessary pursuit of more knowledge than is becoming them; in short, they have learned to be wise with moderation.

These coteries remind one of those that prevailed in England in the days of Queen Elizabeth. Having received a classical education herself, and possessing uncommon parts, she delighted in the society of persons of learning; whence it became fashionable to appear, and which was more, to be conversant in books and knowledge.

This happy turn in the rulers of the English nation, proved no doubt a powerful incentive with such as felt themselves inclined, and endowed with talents, to acquire a name in this province. It produced accordingly the many exertions of genius and capacity, which graced the annals of that celebrated reign.

But

But as the seeds of polite society had not yet sufficiently fructified, and as the rules of elegance in taste, had not yet attained a maturity of refinement, the conversational amusements of her time were, on the whole, rather far fetched and troublesome trials of wit and intellectual dexterity, than easy, unstrained exhibitions of good sense and ingenuity: an affectation of difficult, mysterious expressions, almost as obscure as riddles, infected the common run of discourse, and they who could wrap their meaning in the darkest phrases, were often reputed the most ingenious.

Such were the first attempts towards refining genteel intercourse; which however by degrees shook off these uncouth modes of speaking. They were certainly a heavy shackle and obstruction to the free and easy circulation of words and thoughts; instead of promoting elegance of expression, they frequently prevented clearness and precision in discourse, without which no choice of phrases can render it elegant.

Numberless specimens of this wrong taste are interspersed in the productions of those times, and no few are found even in Shakespeare. Notwithstanding his manifest conviction of their impropriety, still, in compliance with the humour of

of his age, he often condescends to play upon words. The faculty of distorting their original meaning into every possible signification, seemed then to constitute a capital ingredient in a pretender to pleasantry and humour.

Hence the reign of James the First was that of punning; which flourished with the more success, as it proved sometimes a step to preferment. Witness a bishop, who, 'tis said, obtained his mitre by punning a-propos.

Let it however be remembered, that if James made his royal prerogative instrumental in rewarding a punster, the great Cardinal Richelieu, as much a king in fact as the other was in title, bestowed a bishoprick for the sake of making a pun himself. He did this too long after the extinction of that fatuity in England, and at a time when the spirit of improvement had made a sufficient progress in France, to have taught him the contempt of such frivolousness.

But the absurdity of running after this *ignis fatuus* of wit (if one may so stile it) subsided in the reign of Charles the First. Punning was then confined, as it should always be, to familiar and convivial meetings; from whence it were the excess of pedantry to exclude it. While it moves within that circle, it is not only admissible,
but

but highly useful; as it conduces to innocent mirth, and is not altogether devoid of merit, while under the management of a judicious master. They indeed who affect to despise it on all occasions, only betray their want of discrimination, and their incapacity to relish the chearful freedoms of unceremonious society.

From the total banishment of social pleasantry, people sometimes proceed to the expulsion of all other merriment: this was fully exemplified in the reign of the monarch just mentioned. That portion of his subjects which insisted so rigorously on the exclusion of the received modes of private festivity, could not rest satisfied, until they had, after overturning the constitution, destroyed at the same time, every public remnant of popular and long-established diversions. These seemed to their morose and perverted understanding inconsistent with the gravity they thought it necessary to inculcate.

It may not be amiss to remark, that at no time the spirit of science, politeness, and genteel relaxation, had been more closely united, than during the peaceable years of that unfortunate prince.

The genius of manly, solid elegance, both in speech and writing, was beginning to promise the

the noblest harvest of literary glory in this country, when civil calamities put an end to these hopes, and threw the management and direction of our nurseries of polite knowledge, into the hands of the most unfit governors, that ever zeal without discretion, taste, or discernment, could have commissioned for their destruction.

This would in all probability have been completed in a few years, had not the restoration taken place, and happily revived throughout the nation an application to the belles lettres, and to those pursuits that tend to civilize and embellish the minds of men, as well as to instruct them.

Studies of this sort were almost forgotten or proscribed, in the gloomy course of education recommended by the austere people who then superintended both the Universities. They were the faithful delegates of the powers then in being, and acted with the strictest conformity to their enthusiastic ideas.

Notwithstanding the abilities of those who ruled the nation at that period, were in some essential respects highly salutary to the public, yet in this particular no individuals invested with authority were ever more defective.

Their

Their conduct shewed they were miserably ignorant in the great art of training human nature to advantage, in the first and most important stages of life.

The truth was, they were born for the tempestuous times that produced them ; they were men of action, unfit to speculate or direct any where, but in the field of battle, or in factious consultations and debates. Nature had, in a manner, sent them into the world, ready formed for the purposes which they fulfilled: having therefore but little education themselves, they were not sufficiently sensible of its merit and utility to mankind in general.

LETTER V.

On the Diversions and Pastimes of the French Ladies—On French Singing and Music.

I RATHER deviated in my last from the subject of these letters : but as the digression arose partly from it, I hope you will excuse me.

I now return to the French ladies ; and shall endeavour to give you an idea of some of those recreations and amusements that are peculiar to them.

Several of them are remarkably addicted to poetry : that is to say, they take much delight in composing songs, sonnets, stanzas, epigrams, and other etceteras of the same sort.

They occasionally make reciprocal displays of their expertness in these matters, by producing, without any previous study, a poetical composition on any topic which the company chuses. This is a favourite exercise among their select parties.

The vivacity and ease with which some acquit themselves on such occasions, are equally agreeable

agreeable and surprizing to a stranger, who sees little of this exertion of capacity, among the females of his own country.

A single meeting often gives birth to a diversity of productions, which if not perfect in their kind, are at least very presentable to an audience, whose candour and good sense will construe them in the light they were meant, as relaxations, and not labours of the mind.

In this view, they will justly afford credit to their authors, who are certainly at no great pains in framing them.

Neither indeed is the same dexterity and promptitude absent from their other performances; through which a vein of readiness and facility is observable, which shews that writing is as much an amusement to them, as it frequently proves a toil to others.

There is another species of intellectual diversion prevailing among many of the French ladies, which contributes not a little to set their wits at work, and to sharpen their inventions.

It consists in throwing on paper a number of unconnected words, to which every body present is in turn to give a different connection.

D

As

As much ingenuity is oftentimes displayed in these instantaneous exertions of reflection, as need not fear to meet the severest criticism.

If, as it cannot be denied, some of the greatest mistakes and errors in the conducting of affairs, are owing to want of sudden and momentary recollections of thought, and if these are usually so decisive in favour of such as are versed in them, a method which conduces effectually to so beneficial an expertness, cannot be too much applauded and encouraged.

It is a matter of some surprize, that among those continual imitations of what is modish abroad, especially in France, a practice has not been adopted, which would have surely found a kind reception with the sensible and judicious.

No pastime can tend more directly to the improvement of the youth of both sexes, as it must of course excite their keenest endeavours to make themselves acceptable to each other, on account of their sense and capacity.

In the mean time, the improvement of the mind is not the only thing consulted in these coteries. After having paid their tribute at the shrine of literature and ingenuity, *Comus* never fails

fails to be called in to conclude and heighten their festivity.

This is a scene wherein the French act their parts in a manner very different from us.

We are not over apt to deviate from that sobriety of mirth which too strictly presides in most of our mixed companies, where people commonly seem much more on their guard against its excess, than intent to give it any vent at all.

The same turn of temper and disposition characterised us some centuries ago, if that old French author may be credited, who, writing of a metry making of Englishmen, at which he was present, says, *Ils se divertirent moult tristement a la façon de leur pays*; they diverted themselves very sadly according to the custom of their country.

The very reverse of such a strain is the case in France, where a dissoluteness of mirth, and the extremes of every kind of jocundity, are indulged with little reserve.

This, however of the two, seems preferable. It answers the end more efficaciously than the former, which leaves the mind in the same situ-

ation it was found ; nay, often obliges us to have recourse to further expedients, in order to banish the gloom occasioned by a fit of self-restraint on the spirit of joy. This naturally is averse to the observance of rules, and loves to act according to its original impulse, and break forth without order and premeditation.

The practice of singing being every where considered as a demonstration of inward satisfaction and delight, and one of the most pleasing concomitances of social festivity, it may well be presumed that the French, who of all people pretend to understand best the art of carrying mirth to perfection, should make singing one of their most ordinary pastimes.

The French ladies are particularly fond of excelling in this, as in every other attainment conducive to jovialness.

In most of their meetings and parties, a display of their vocal faculties seems an indispensable requisite to render them completely agreeable.

No people can take more pleasure in this amusement. In France the end of a feast is always the beginning of a singing match, wherein

wherein every one must contribute his contingent *tant bien que mal*, according to his best.

The French will have it, that a man must prove a wretched performer indeed, if, by the jovial method of his performance, he is not able to make up for the defects of voice and harmony.

The French entertain a very superior notion of their abilities in these respects, and very confidently affirm that they alone know how to sing.

Without endeavouring to ascertain the precise date of its origin, there is an adage of great antiquity in France, and received with implicit belief by most Frenchmen. The text is, *dolet Hispanus, flet Italus, Germanus boät, Flander ululat, solus Gallus cantat*; the Spaniard moans, the Italian whines, the German roars, the Fleming howls, the Frenchman only sings.

What is remarkable in this celebrated catalogue and appreciation of singers, is, that no mention is made of the English, as if our talents in this particular were so slender as to remain beneath all notice.

In other cases, due regard has been shewn to us both by them and other nations; the Italians especially, in their well known review of the characteristics peculiar to each European nation, have assigned us a very honourable station. They describe us in colours that ought to be reputed the more genuine and approaching to truth, as one cannot suspect their pencil to have been guided by interest or adulation.

Even Charles the Fifth, in his notable comment on the European languages, thought the English was agreeable enough to be classed with that of the feathered kind.

How therefore it came to pass that we were forgotten by the French in the above cited enumeration of songsters, is somewhat remarkable: for though we do not claim in this branch the superlative degree of merit, yet we may challenge the right of being in the words of Horace

Extremi priorum, extremis usque priores.

Behind the foremost and before the last.

This omission, therefore, will be most probably accounted for, by supposing the above adage to have been made at a period, when singing was

was as little practised and encouraged in England, as it is at this day in the northern countries of Europe, where vocal music is much less in request than in the southern parts.

But the superior merit arrogated by the French on this occasion, unless it may be for the poetry of their music, is universally regarded as a very groundless pretension.

Such is the opinion, not only of the connoisseurs in that art among the English, who were never so numerous as of late years, but also of those in other nations, particularly the Italians, who avowedly excell all people in this science.

The celebrated Rousseau in his noted critique on the French opera, reprobates the taste of the French in music; and Voltaire himself, speaking of it, uses these remarkable words, *Notre musique n'est du gout d'aucune autre nation*; our music is not relished by any other nation.

The style of French compositions is so disagreeable to foreigners in general, that while a great deal of Italian, German, Portuguese, and even English music, is indiscriminately played in various parts of Europe, no French music is performed but in France.

This defect of taste in musical composition, is the more extraordinary and surprizing, as France abounds with instrumental performers, many of whom are allowed to have first-rate merit in point of execution.

From the severity of these strictures, one should, however, except the airs of many of their songs, and much of their church music: this often is very grand and solemn, and the former extremely chearful and pleasing.

The style of French composition is so different to foreigners in general, that while a great deal of Italian, German, Polish, Greek, and even English music, is indiscriminately played in various parts of Europe, no French music is performed but in France.

I. E. I.

This

LETTER VI.

On the Notions of the French Ladies respecting their superior Taste in Dress and personal Ornaments—meddling Disposition of the French Women.

I HAVE again wandered from the French ladies, and I now return to them.

After viewing them in their coteries, let us follow them to their toilets, which will afford us perhaps as ample a scope for speculation as any other place and situation.

The French ladies are fully persuaded that the genius of taste and elegance in apparel, and every ornament that invention contrives to grace the human frame, belongs to them with an exclusive right.

This indeed is no less the creed of their countrymen, concerning their own talents in these matters. Their vanity would be highly offended, were a foreigner to dispute their supremacy on this point.

But

But whether the rest of the world assent to the rectitude of this conviction, might prove a discussion no ways favourable to their prepossessions.

In order to support them, they will doubtless alledge the universal consent of the European world, in adopting the ways and ideas of the French, in many, if not most, of these respects.

But imitation of any mode is no certain proof of the imitator's approbation, any more than of the propriety of the mode itself.

Various are the reasons that may be assigned for this frequent adoption. Among others, the prodigious number of French servants of both sexes, in most families of distinction, in other countries, in England especially, may be accounted the foremost.

As they are generally keen and intelligent, and almost always in the upper list of domestics, they avail themselves with amazing dexterity of every opportunity to render themselves of some consequence. As they are extremely attached to their country, and all that belongs to it, they are ever extolling its methods and manners of acting and living, and lose no occasion of introducing them, wherever the least opening offers.

It

It is chiefly by such means, together with the vanity and ostentation of the many young travellers who visit France, that French fashions are so extensively diffused.

We must however acknowledge, that though this diffusion be no argument of their superior merit, yet it is a consideration that should induce us to admire the sagacity of the French, in propagating so successfully a notion of such national benefit to them.

Notwithstanding we may doubt the pre-eminence of taste in dress, which the French women arrogate with so much confidence and parade, they are certainly gifted with such a knack of magnifying the worth of bagatelles, and of making much out of nothing, that whatever they devise relative to the ornament and setting off of their persons, is generally thought agreeable and becoming.

This however the French are of opinion, is much more owing to that ease and sprightliness attending their deportment, than to the real beauty of those dressy decorations they invent in such profusion.

Their gait, their address, their air, the whole, in short, of their external behaviour, is, in their
idea,

idea, so much a constituent part, not only of their persons, but even of what adorns them, and the connexion between them is so apposite and well adapted, that what was formerly said of the military accoutrements of the Roman soldiers, may as justly be applied to a French lady's adjustments, that through use and expertness, they seem as natural to her, as members to the body.

Such is the opinion both the men and women of France entertain of their national merit in these particulars.

An appendix in their apparel not to be forgotten, are the long trains, which the women of distinguished rank, consider as a necessary denotation of it, on every occasion that offers of administering to their vanity.

They are no less attentive to the number and magnificence of their menial attendants; one of whom, always the handsomest fellow, is honoured with the office of train-bearer, if her rank will allow that piece of ostentation.

Some ladies of the *premiere volée*, are on certain occasions attended by youths most richly and elegantly clad, and in beauty and comeliness not unlike so many cupids, as the spectator observed

observed long ago. These are dignified with the appellation of pages; a title more honourable in France than in any other country in Europe. Their mistresses or masters are in a manner bound to make some decent provision for them; as they are commonly the indigent offspring of genteel families decayed in their fortunes, who are glad to avail themselves of this custom among the great nobility, to entertain in their household a certain number of these young gentlemen. Through fortunate accidents, together with their own prudence, in managing to advantage the opportunities thrown in their way, several of them often become persons of eminence in the various departments of the state, in the army especially.

French writers have thought proper to pay a particular regard to the pretended ascendancy of their countrywomen, and men too, in the article of dress over other nations. They have laboured minutely to prove the poverty of genius in these weighty matters, among their neighbours, and to expose their awkwardness and temerity, whenever they venture to depart from French models, and to set up patterns of their own invention.

These selfish conceits infect them to a shameful degree. An author, the gravity of whose profession,

profession, being a Dominican Friar, might have excused him from treating of such a topic, bestows no small portion of his attention on the imaginary preference a French lady's dress merited, when compared with that of an English one. This too he did in a part of the world, where his thoughts and observations ought to have been more consistent with the purport of his errand, which was that of a missionary in the West-Indies.

The person here meant is father Labat; from whose merit, which is unquestionable in other respects, this is by no means intended as any deduction.

Whatever opinion the French of both sexes may cherish of their unrivalled excellence in these points, the fact is, that they are greatly mistaken, if they suppose that the fashionable people throughout Europe implicitly subscribe to their ideas. In each country they have a style of their own; and though they borrow occasionally some of the French modes, the French in their turn, without attending to it perhaps, copy those of other nations.

The frequent resort of French individuals of rank to England, has of late years brought the scale of imitation almost to an equality: it is even

even questionable at present, which of these celebrated rival nations imitates the other most.

We may dismiss this uninteresting subject, by observing, that as nothing is more unsettled than fashion, which is perpetually undergoing the strangest varieties and vicissitudes, it is absolutely ridiculous, to assign any degree of praise or demerit, to what seems at all times to have been conducted by no other rule than that of caprice.

The French are perhaps the only people we ever heard of, who pride themselves in the talent of inventing graceful modes of apparel: No other Europeans think it worth their while to aim at supremacy in so frivolous an object. Nor does it appear, that either the Greeks or the Romans, or any other nation of old, ever thought of counting their manner of dressing among the qualifications on which they valued themselves.

Fashion may in some measure be compared to personal deportment; which is partly regulated by the customs peculiar to divers nations. What in some is deemed impertinent, passes in others for a modest assurance; and so repugnant and contradictory are many of their notions, that defects on the one hand, are often construed into good qualities on the other.

It

It is therefore no less unjust than absurd, to contend for national pre-eminence in matters so indifferent in their nature, and so little deserving of any serious attention. For this reason, writers should content themselves with a cursory mention of the disparity subsisting in these respects, in various countries, without arrogantly determining, as is too commonly the case, which is the most commendable.

This fault the rest of Europe unanimously complain, the French authors are more frequently guilty of than any others, by their partial decisions in favour of those fashions that originate in France.

Let us now enter that sanctuary of art and refinement, where a French lady prepares those charms and graces, which she proposes to display in proper time and place.

That sanctuary you will readily guess to be her toilet. Here she is in her center, and may, without exaggeration, be represented as seated on her throne. Here she reigns unrivalled; and the homages she receives, give her an air of satisfaction and authority, in the exercise of which she delights to consume a large portion of her time.

But

But cosmetic functions, however important, are not the most material part of the business to which this beloved spot is dedicated.

A French lady usually discusses here whatever comes under her cognizance, which is very extensive.

Notwithstanding she is above scrutinizing into the smaller concerns of family matters, she expects to be consulted and advised with in all things of importance.

The former she leaves to the management of her confidential servants, as beneath her notice and dignity, but she claims an equal right with her husband, in the direction of the most material and intricate affairs, whether domestic or out of doors.

Herein, I apprehend, lies the chief distinction between a French, and English Lady. This latter is principally taken up with domestic occurrences, in which the assiduity and diligence of our countrywomen is usually very exemplary.

The French women of rank, on the other hand, are rather negligent in this province, comparatively to the English. While these rely on the prudence and activity of their husbands in
E transactions

transactions abroad, the others are not easy, unless they are allowed to participate in all the business of the men.

Hence they are perpetually engaged in a multiplicity of avocations from home, prompted by motives of curiosity, officiousness, or ambition, those great stimulants of women kind, but whose influence over the sex is felt no where more powerfully than in France.

The rage of being noticed in the world, is more prevalent in the females of this country than in those of any other. It is in a manner become traditional among them. When they are told how much they differ from the women of other parts of Europe in these instances, they hold the difference to be in their favour, and that it argues a lively, active spirit, more deserving of applause than discouragement.

Such is the ardour of some to put themselves forward, that the more public the sphere may be, wherein they are determined to figure, the less they are willing to recede from the measures they have taken for that purpose. To arrive at conspicuity, is an object, for the obtaining of which the quiet and comforts of home, are readily sacrificed.

This

This violent appetite to command the attention of the community, is, in short, a species of national disease among many of the fashionable females in France. And is the more blameable, as the means employed for that end, are often far from being meritorious.

While we censure thus freely, a failing notorious among the French women of distinction, impartiality requires on the other hand, that equal praise should be given to the many ladies who aim at being conspicuous in a manner more suitable to their character, and more conducive to utility.

While numbers involve themselves in affairs, from which they reap more trouble and anxiety than satisfaction and praise, there are many others, whose patronage is the support of sundry useful foundations, and a considerable part of whose revenue is consecrated to deeds of generosity and pious munificence.

The most illustrious promoter of this laudable spirit was Madam de Maintenon. She has been happily imitated: many charitable institutions in France owe to her memory that tribute of gratitude, which is due to those who have given birth to public benefits, by the power and influence of their example.

Having thus cited this last and greatest favourite of Lewis XIV. it is but just to say something on the same score, of that rival whom her more fortunate star discarded, Madam de Montespan.

This lady closed her days in a very exemplary manner; expending the major part of her annual income in providing for the decent settlement in life of many a worthy couple; and atoning by this truly noble strain of solid piety, for the scandal which her connexion with that monarch had occasioned in the minds of the religious part of the nation.

LETTER

L E T T E R VII.

*On the Gait and Air of the French Women—
Beauty not so common in France as in England.*

IT is observable, that notwithstanding their natural vivacity, the French women are not in general so active as the English.

Among these bodily exercises are incomparably more in use. Though their gait may by some not be thought so remarkably graceful, nor their feats in a ball-room so various, yet they will out-walk and out-dance the French, over whom their dexterity and courage in horsemanship is obvious.

The activity of the French ladies is of a more sedate and less dangerous nature. They delight in frequenting such public places of resort, as require only an ambulatory motion, in which they esteem themselves conspicuously excelling.

The gracefulness of a French lady's step, is always a subject of high commendation in the mouth of every Frenchman.

It

It cannot be denied that their movements are regular and agreeable ; but there seems no necessity of attributing to them that majesty which their admirers pretend, is so characteristically discernible.

Frenchmen are in raptures when they speak of a French lady's gait, and are apt to describe it in the same manner, that Virgil represents in the apparition of Venus to Æneas, the enchanting dignity of her port and demeanour.

The truth is, that as observed with regard to fashion, all this may not unjustly be reckoned mere matter of opinion. What by some is accounted graceful, and what the French call *degagé*, appearing to others bold and *effronté* ; a word well understood, but not easily rendered with precision. The vulgar call it brazen.

These aims at stateliness in the French ladies, so highly extolled by their countrymen, have accordingly been treated by others as affectation, or to give them softer terms, as a needless solicitude to shew their persons to advantage.

But as attempts to please, though it were in trifles, ought not to be discouraged, the French women are certainly deserving of praise, for endeavouring (though their methods may be occasionally

sionally erroneous) to supply the general sparingness of nature in the embellishment of their outward frame, by every assistance that art can afford.

It must not be dissembled, that our own much fairer countrymen are too often apt to forget, that native charms may receive considerable improvement, by condescending to attend somewhat to the regulation of carriage and motion.

They ought to be reminded, that it is chiefly by an attention of this kind, the French women, though unable to rival them in such exterior perfections as are the gift of nature, attain however to a degree of eminence in other accomplishments, that effaces the recollection of their inferiority in personal charms.

When we add to this the wit and vivacity of a cultivated understanding, unaffected cheerfulness, and agreeable manners, it ought impartially to be acknowledged, that the French ladies, though endowed with only a moderate share of beauty, need not regret the want of more, and may rest fully satisfied that the pains they have taken to counterbalance that defect, afford them an ample compensation.

E 4

But

But notwithstanding the many engaging qualities of the French women, even their own countrymen are too much disposed to reflect on this deficiency, and to lament, that in forming them with so remarkable an aptitude and inclination to please, by almost every other motive that can ingratiate them with the other sex, nature should have so frequently denied them an adequate measure of those attractions that operate so invincibly on the sight, and are so often more powerful alone than the united force of every other consideration.

The fact is, that beauty is a plant far from being of so general a growth in France as in some other countries; one is often obliged to seek for it there with as much difficulty, as it may be found with ease in England.

Agreeable objects are met with here, in such profusion, as well warrants the epigram once made on its women by a foreigner of wit and distinction, on a visit to the court of Charles the First; the last line of it pays them the compliment of saying, *Huc venerem credas transposuisse Paphon*, one would think that Venus had transported Paphos to this island.

The French climate and soil are so favourable to human nature, the produce of the earth so salutary, the air so clear and wholesome, that naturalists

turalists are puzzled to account for the inferiority in this particular, of both the men and women of that kingdom to those of several other parts of Europe.

The French, however notorious for extolling themselves in other respects, readily yield the palm of beauty and comeliness to some of their neighbours. It would ill become them, indeed, to claim it with the same tenaciousness with which they challenge the superiority in all other endowments.

A proverb in France, which is no weak argument of the scarcity of female beauty there, is the following; that a handsome woman is the goddess of her acquaintance, the queen of her husband, and the tyrant of her lovers.

The saying seems to be true enough in every respect.

The name of a beautiful woman here is on every tongue, and her charms are dwelt upon with equal fervour and repetition. Her husband is attentive to the most distant hints of her wishes and desires. Were he to appear negligent or remiss in obeying her commands, he would be universally stigmatized, as a man unworthy of the prize that fortune has thrown into his possession.

But

But however he may prove humble and obsequious, he must not expect to monopolize her attention. This would deprive her of those endless homages, that seem to compose the principal ingredient in the happiness of a handsome woman in France. To see a train of admirers prostrate at the shrine of her perfections, is a triumph which a French woman, conscious of her external charms, and of the high rate they are valued at in a country where they do not abound, is not of a humour to sacrifice to domestic tranquillity and retirement from the croud.

Hence those legions of followers that besiege her, not only in every place of public resort, but in the very penetralia of her house, that infest her most private recesses, and scarce leave her a moment she can properly call her own.

In return, she possesses the absolute command of her adorers. They receive and perform the minutest of her orders with the utmost readiness and punctuality. Their time and activity become wholly devoted to her will and caprice, and her word is a law which must not be disputed. Even their purse, that most delicate part of every man's system, is at her disposal. There is indeed, no province where the French are more profuse of their pecuniary favours, than in matters where women are concerned.

Thus

Thus it appears the above cited proverb is fully verified. It tallies at the same time very remarkably with another of similar tendency, and which every parisian is desirous a stranger should be apprized of, on his arrival at that metropolis. In describing it, he usually takes care to inform him by way of postscript, that Paris is the paradise of women, and the purgatory of men.

There is a circumstance that might induce one to imagine the French women are extremely sensible of their want of beauty.

In spite of their passion for public entertainments, and the inherent propensity of the sex to think highly of their attractions, they seem to have chiefly in view the first motive that leads to such places, to see more than to be seen.

This may account perhaps for the much greater readiness they manifest for twilight walks, than the English women. With these the approach of the dusk is a signal to retire from those scenes of universal meeting, where they have enjoyed the triumph of those charms that are most conspicuous by the light of day.

LET-

LETTER VIII.

On the difference of Disposition between the French and English Women—Strictures on some French Ladies—Ninon de Lenclos,

I WOULD not have you infer from the praises I have bestowed on the wit and liveliness of the French ladies, that less value is to be set on the disposition of our own country women.

It is far from being inferior in any essential respect; though it may at the same time be allowed, they do not so much as the French, endeavour to recommend themselves by a sociableness and festivity of behaviour.

Conscious where their chief advantage lies, the French women spare no pains to improve that fund of vivacity which is in its nature so agreeable, and which they know how to render so entertaining.

They are careful to adorn it by a sufficient store of those pleasurable ideas, that contribute
so

so effectually to enliven company; and are no less dextrous in dealing them out with so much discretion and sagacity, as to suit them exactly and most engagingly to the temper, situation and capacity of those with whom they converse. Hence it is that foreigners of all countries pronounce the French ladies transcendently captivating.

An upright heart, and a sensibility of soul, are doubtless the noblest qualifications in the fair sex. These the English women possess in an eminent degree. But a pleasingness of disposition that can smoothen the rough passages in life, and dissipate those clouds which its incumbrances are so often suspending over the mind, is perhaps more conducive to social happiness, than endowments in themselves more exalted and respectable.

As every nation is framed with inclinations equally resulting from, and accommodated to the genius of their country and climate, so in the personal and intellectual repartition of things, their endowments are so providentially ordained, as to leave them no cause to wish for an exchange with those of any other people.

Conformably to this rule, nature, in regard to the French women, has given a remarkable instance of her impartiality.

If

If mediocrity be their lot in point of comeliness, they are in recompence endued with an engagingness in their humour and manner, that makes sufficient amends; it secures to them the affections of men by the strongest of all tenures, that of an attachment founded on the experience of the pleasure enjoyed in their society.

Let us consult on this subject that exquisite judge of woman kind, the celebrated Count Bonneval; whose retreat and settlement in Turkey, was doubtless influenced by the views of dedicating his life to those enjoyments, which to a man of his amorous constitution appeared the most desirable, and were at the same time authorized by the laws and customs of the country.

Among the many charmers, whom his industrious researches had assembled from the several countries anyways renowned for the production of beauty, his homage was chiefly confined to three, an English, a German, and a French woman.

As his distinctions of female merit were nice, so his retribution of feelings was proportionate. Now of these three, the first enjoyed his utmost gratitude, the second possessed his fullest confidence,

dence, but the third was the mistress of his heart. Yet this last had done least to claim it. The proofs of attachment given by the former two were of the strongest nature; whereas he had no plea for his partiality to the last, but that irresistible something which is not so easily defined as felt; but which must necessarily proceed from the superior power of pleasing in some women more than in others.

In no country so much as in France, is the devotion of men to the sex more influenced by that capriciousness of the soul, which makes it liable to be fascinated by a *je ne sai quoi*. one knows not what, as the French very well express it.

Experience daily shews, that it is sometimes not only impossible to account by words to others, but even through dint of thought and reflexion to ourselves, what it really is that in-chains our will and affections, and subjects them to persons, of whom it not seldom happens that we know but little, and too frequently indeed, that we know nothing, which we durst assign as the cause of their ascendancy over us.

The only motive to be alledged in these cases, as the spring of action on the human passions, is that enchantment of our faculties, effected by
the

the attraction we naturally feel for whatever is capable of conferring delight.

Now this capacity, numbers of the French ladies, it must be acknowledged, possess in a degree seldom found in other women. They have it from nature by their vivacity and cheerfulness, ever on the wing, ever panting as it were for opportunities to display themselves, and not less from art, as their education is usually attended with those agreeable improvements, that lay a foundation for the complete enjoyment of every pleasure which leisure and fortune can throw in their way.

Thus armed and prepared, it is not surprising their conquests should be so sure and rapid.

Men are invincibly prone to form attachments, to which they are drawn by such powerful and flattering invitations: even they who are most swayed by reason in these matters, will hardly resist their inclinations, when they consider the perpetuity of those endearments that give them birth, and that should the warmth of passion decrease, inducements enough will remain to render a connexion highly delectable.

These are the considerations that operate in the breast of those who feel so forcibly the charms

charms of the fair sex in France; where the sight alone is seldom liable to be irresistibly invaded; an accident which from the frequency of delightful objects, happens in no country so often as in England.

What is called love at first sight, is no imaginary Being among us; and sometimes exercises as much sway, as impressions arising from a long acquaintance.

This may possibly be accounted for by recollecting, that the different endowments of woman kind in divers countries, always determine the peculiar sensations that men experience in their respective attachments.

Thus the French women who are lively and entertaining, captivate by their dexterity, and we are charmed with their manner and address.

The English on the other hand, being both beautiful and sensible, they enchant alike our eyes and our understanding; and the value we set on their minds, is enhanced by the loveliness of their persons.

The excessive vivacity of the French women degenerates sometimes into a volatility that proves of pernicious consequence; it destroys

F

that

that dignity of deportment which is necessary to command respect, and by abating confidence, it never fails to diminish love.

Volatility produces frequently a still greater evil : when too much indulged, it ingenders a propensity to fluctuation and coquetry, which is highly disgusting to men who pay their addresses upon honourable terms, and who must necessarily hate to be trifled with.

Far different is the character of our countrywomen, in whom an appearance of affection is very seldom unaccompanied by the reality. The consequence is, that men usually put more trust in them, and are more taken with their plainness and sincerity, than with the brilliant attractions of the French.

There is a class of women in France, who though possess of all the desires and powers of pleasing, yet seldom please long. These are the ladies of the *haut ton*, that make so conspicuous a figure in the annals of the gay and fashionable world, by the freedom of their lives, and the unrestraining maxims they adopt and practise in all that is conducive to pleasure.

Their system of enjoying life is the more seducing, as it throws in some shape the veil of decency

decency over licentiousness, and while it gives a loose to libertinism, is at the same time careful to preserve appearances, so far as they can be preserved in a country where so much freedom and latitude are allowed in personal demeanour.

With every advantage that female art can derive from native or acquired charms, and from the ascendancy it possesses over our sex, the prepossession so readily conceived in their favour, is usually of short duration in the minds of those who seek for an unfeigned reciprocal attachment, and are not content with a transient semblance of partiality.

Subdued by the allurements of their inticing and insinuating behaviour, men naturally wish for a return of the sentiments they feel: a denial awakens their reflexion, and this soon convinces them, that they ought to beware of a society where love is not repaid with love.

The fact is, that as a French woman of this sort glories in a multitude of admirers, her predilection cannot be great for any one in particular. The discovery of such a disposition cools a man of sense, and renders him averse to engage any further than an interchange of civil expressions, which custom authorises, and which, however warm and affectionate, are

sufficiently understood to be binding on neither party.

True it is that many of our young travellers, who frequent much the company of the French fashionable ladies, are not proof against the blandishments of which they are such expert mistresses.

A man must be endued with a very extraordinary share of firmness and constancy, in his preference of the less shining qualities of candour, discretion, modesty, and the other countless ornaments of an English woman's character, to oppose them effectually, and while operating only through the force of remembrance, to the more splendid, though less amiable qualifications of wit, vivacity, and sprightliness of humour and deportment, that embellish the whole system of so many French ladies, and render them completely irresistible in their attempts to subdue the hearts of pliant, unexperienced youth.

But still there is an infallible antidote against the poison contained in their charms; this antidote is the levity just mentioned; which prevents them from settling their affections upon any object exclusively and lastingly.

This

This changeful frame of mind commonly puts an end to connexions commenced with the most flattering appearances of permanency, and is the source from whence flows the notorious mutability of both sexes throughout France, in their softer intercourses.

Nor does this changefulness seem in the least to detriment the character of either the gentlemen or the ladies; as they are equally subject to its influence, they forgive each other their trespasses in these matters with unaffected cordiality. They seem, indeed, in what relates to gallantry, to follow with a sort of reverential implicitness, the maxim attributed to the famous Ninon de Lenclos; *jamais delicate sur le nombre, mais toujours sur le choix de ses amours*. Never delicate in the number, but always in the choice of her lovers.

Pursuant to the principles of that celebrated lady, her imitators, who are numerous among the fair, seem to think, that provided their connexions in this line, are formed with persons of rank and reputation, it matters little, how frequently they are engaged in amorous intrigues.

It may not be, on this occasion, improper to remark, that the example of the lady above cited, has in all likelihood greatly contributed to that freedom, or rather licentiousness of manners, to call it by its proper name, which too much prevails among the females of high rank in France.

She was in all respects, but that of gallantry, a woman of irreproachable character: Her behaviour was a model of perfect decency and good breeding; her sentiments were noble and generous in the sublimest degree, and her actions entirely corresponded with them. Many are the anecdotes recorded of her magnanimity and beneficence. What was particularly remarkable, her loves always ended in the strictest and sincerest friendships; her fidelity had frequent trials in the troublesome times she lived in; but always remained inviolable. As her attachments were indiscriminately among the celebrated personages that divided France into factions at that day, she became of course acquainted with many of their secrets, and was often entrusted with deposits of the highest value. But she never betrayed the confidence of any man; and while the spoils of her numerous lovers, friends, and acquaintance, lay at her option, either to secure for their owners, or to waste or embezzle without fear of detection, she was never known to swerve

swerve in one single instance, from the strictest rules of disinterestedness and integrity.

This was the more singular and praise-worthy, as she was surrounded by examples of perfidy and baseness. The ministry of Cardinal Mazarin was an æra of the most shameful venality. Public spirit and private probity received a dreadful shock under his government; and the French were become loose and profligate beyond the precedents of former periods.

When we view Ninon de Lenclos in this illustrious and exemplary light, when we reflect that she was admired, beloved, and caressed by all that was great and exalted in France, royalty itself not excepted, and that casting the veil of oblivion on one single frailty, she was a pattern of every accomplishment that dignifies her sex; when all these considerations are duly weighed, we need not be surprized, that her name is so respectfully remembered in her country, and that her failing is lost and forgotten in the enumeration of the many virtues and eminent qualities that composed her character.

Unhappily however for the generations that followed, the splendour that accompanied her public life and actions, seemed in some measure to apologize, and even to atone for her private irregularities.

irregularities. They of course who felt an inclination to imitate her in the least meritorious part of her conduct, did not fail at the same time to propose to themselves an adequate imitation of her excellencies.

Determinations of this kind have doubtless helped to people France with numerous copies of this celebrated original. Neither should it be denied, that many of them have been remarkably successful. They have had the art of allying a system of voluptuous immorality with the exercise of many valuable qualifications, and have often proved very beneficial members of that society, which their actions did not always edify.

But in the midst of those freedoms, in which Ninon thought proper to indulge herself, she had an excuse to plead (if any excuse can be admitted) which is not always in the power of her followers to alledge. She was a single woman, and remained such all her life, notwithstanding the solicitations of men of the first consequence in the realm, to favour them with her hand.

She knew her own nature; and being disposed to persist in the indulgencies she had granted it, she had too much honour to deceive any man by false appearances.

Such

Such probably was the motive that kept her out of the pale of matrimony. Had she ever been prevailed upon to alter her condition, it is equally probable, from the native greatness of her soul, that she would have proved a model of conjugal fidelity.

It were sincerely to be wished, for the honour and happiness of her sex in France, that she had consented to become a wife, as every reason concurs to render it likely that she would have done the highest credit to that appellation.

In the mean time, as vice, especially of the pleasurable kind, is more readily imitated than virtue, her failings have many more votaries than her good qualities; and the variety of intrigues, for which she was remarkable, seems to be an encouragement to the ladies of the present age, to tread in her footsteps with equal alacrity.

Inconstancy therefore may be looked upon as a sort of prerogative among the fair sex of high rank in France. They who embrace contrary maxims, may almost be said to give up their right and title to what is become their due by long prescription.

To

To the gay young gentlemen who abound in that country, whether they be natives or foreigners, such a disposition in the sex is doubtless highly pleasing; and is unquestionably a motive for a longer residence there, much oftener than has been suspected.

But as no lasting impressions are ever made by characters of so volatile a stamp, no danger can accrue to the future happiness of those who frequent their society: They are perpetually witnesses of so many transient attachments, that they soon become thoroughly convinced of the folly of relying upon any.

This foible, indeed, always proves the most efficacious and sovereign remedy for those maladies of the heart, that usually seize on young gentlemen during their travels in France.

Were it not for that proneness to change adorers in the French ladies, it would be a difficult task to break their chains: but these, to continue the metaphor, are weak and brittle; and they themselves are, in a manner, solicitous you should not wear them long, through that spirit of coquetry which prompts them to vary their attachments; no favourite, however complete in a female eye, can long prevent the increase of the catalogue.

In

In descriptions of this nature, you will allow me, as well as every other man who handles his pen on the like subjects, to take some liberty in the colouring; and not expect a rigid exactness in drawing pictures, which the warmth of writing induces one imperceptibly to paint in perhaps too glaring a light.

I have undoubtedly taken great freedom in this representation of the French women of condition. Possibly I have been unnecessarily severe, and have extended censure and suspicion beyond their strict bounds.

But on the other hand, it may be asserted that the liberties in their behaviour, and the excessive levity they display on a multiplicity of occasions, afford one cause to make remarks no ways favourable to their character, and to think but too justly, that if they keep themselves unblameable in essentials, still many of the ways and manners they have thought proper to adopt, have certainly a very loose appearance, and are totally inconsistent with decency and decorum.

LET-

LETTER IX.

On the Disparity of Notions on Love and Marriage, in France and in England.

THE French people of rank differ materially from the English, in their conduct in matrimonial occurrences: from the system they follow on these occasions, one might conclude their ideas were as widely different concerning the passion of love.

In England we make it, not without reason, a very serious affair. We look on a choice of objects, uninfluenced by servile considerations, as essentially necessary to mutual happiness. This, though occasionally deviated from, is the standing popular maxim of this country, equally sacred among the upper and lower classes.

But in France Love is too generally treated as a matter of little importance, and by numbers of such as pretend to the title of discreet persons, is viewed in no other light than as a meer *folie de jeunesse*, folly of youth.

In

In a country where the association of the two sexes is so much owing to other accidents and causes than those which nature originally intended, it follows of course that a disunion of hearts and sentiments should be the ordinary consequence.

This, indeed, must almost necessarily prevail between persons who come together from motives of convenience only; we must expect such to disagree, and that they should seek elsewhere for those enjoyments and gratifications which opulence alone cannot give.

This indifference for each other before and after marriage, is chiefly found however among the great: among the secondary classes it is far from being so prevalent; and the common people seem to be much on a footing, in these respects, with their similars in other countries.

In England, even among persons of the highest order, nature and good sense are usually consulted in matrimonial connexions. Compulsion can hardly be suspected in a country where personal freedom is so firmly established by the constitution. If ever it is used, it must be in the most indirect manner, and always divested of any appearance of violence: in short, it can only operate on the weak spirited and the interested,

interested ; as it can only amount, at the worst, to threats of refusal to befriend the parties, in case of non compliance.

But in France it is far otherwise : matches among the quality, are made between persons who never saw, nor possibly ever heard of each other ; they may be considered as alliances of different families, for the reciprocal purposes of avarice or interest, of which the young couple are to become the cement and legal ratification.

Neither of these latter, indeed, seem to have the least influence throughout the whole transaction ; it is carried on without their participation, and often without their knowledge.

It happens not uncommonly that during the whole course of the business, the young gentleman, if the times are peaceable, is with his regiment in garrison in some frontier town ; or, if the kingdom is at war, is making a campaign in Italy, Germany, or Flanders.

In the same manner his future spouse is inclosed within the walls of a convent, some hundred miles distant from the capital : in this recess, probably, she has spent the spring years of her life, secluded from the company and
con-

conversation of those who might have fitted her for the world, and brought up in practices of devotion, very little calculated for the station she is designed to fill.

I will not say that her education is absolutely neglected; on the contrary, there are always in those houses some women who are no strangers to polite society, and who may give her a tolerable theory of what she is to expect to see and experience among mankind; she has also ample leisure to store her mind with abundance of good reading, and to learn a variety of little arts and methods of occupying herself profitably and agreeably.

But still the great desideratum of all is wanting, the addition of practice to theory. Speculation is ridiculous, when applied to those duties that can only be learned by actual exercise; one might as well be taught to dance, fence, or ride, by reading treatises upon those subjects, as to acquire the knowledge requisite for a woman that is to be a wife, a mother, and a mistress of a family, by residing with females who have forsworn all ideas of this nature, and have dedicated themselves to a system of living that precludes all connections with human society.

In

In the mean time the negociation goes on; and if not interrupted by the difficulty of making proper settlements, or the uncertainty of the various promises or prospects that are interchangeably held out on these occasions, it is at length brought about and concluded by the sole intervention of the heads of those families that are to be united in views and interests by this marriage.

The young lady and her destined partner are summoned accordingly from their respective residences, and introduced to each other with almost as much formality as sovereign princes and princesses, whose meeting together would offend the etiquette, were it to take place antecedently to the nuptial ceremony.

This therefore is soon performed, and the young couple invested with all that magnificence and splendour, for the display and parade of which they were principally brought together.

Thus without any previous acquaintance, affection, or even assent, they are tied to each other by an indissoluble knot: person, temper, inclination, manners, are entirely out of the question; the only motives that are deemed worthy of notice on such an occasion, are high birth or great riches.

Far

Far be it from any man of sense to speak disparagingly of either; they are both desirable objects when accompanied by an agreeable person, and a respectable character; but experience daily shews they are insufficient to indemnify those who are so ready to sacrifice all things to avarice or to ambition.

I will say nothing of those attachments which the respective parties may possibly have contracted before their union; these the French are apt to consider as meer bagatelles, easily got over by sensible, discreet people, and unfit to enter into competition with the solid advantages of which they are put in possession.

Besides, they always take it for granted; that a young gentleman, especially if in the army, is engaged in such a multitude of intrigues, that his heart can never be enslaved to any fair one in particular.

As to the young lady, immured as she is in the solitude of a convent, and watched by so many careful eyes, it is not to be supposed that her sight can ever fasten on any object capable of disturbing her tranquillity.

But how unfounded are such reasonings? Is every man who wears a uniform necessarily dis-

vested of all sentimental feelings? Is mere voluptuousness the basis of all his attachments? What a poor compliment to gentlemen of the sword, to deem them incapable of an honourable attachment, and only fit for the purposes of sensuality!

The fact is, that the very reverse of all this is generally true: military men are found in all countries to be remarkably fond husbands and tender parents: they would not be such if mercenary considerations had influenced their choice of a companion for life. Gratitude is the utmost a woman has to expect from a man who takes her hand for the sake of any thing but herself; and civil treatment is the most she usually meets with.

Fondness is the offspring of love, and is only the portion of those who nourish a reciprocal passion for each other. These passionate attachments belong only to youth; and the first they form are, if not the strongest and most permanent, at least too powerful to be effaced by meer dint of pecuniary interest in men of gallant and generous dispositions.

Now it cannot be denied, that the generality of those who embrace the profession of arms, are men of this character. How then is it to be imagined,

imagined, that a young gentleman in the vigour of life, and the fulness of passions, should be daily conversant with young and handsome women, precisely in the same predicament as himself, without entering into some endearing connection.

It is common in France among these military gentlemen, whose families are not of the first rate, to marry among the genteeler classes of the provinces and towns where their regiments happen to be stationed: this is what they call *un mariage de garnison*: I have known several of these garrison marriages; and have observed that persons thus united by inclination, sentiment, and parity of circumstances, are usually the happiest.

In the mean while, it is not less unreasonable to think, that a young lady, because she dwells in a convent, is lost to every prospect of society. Her youthful fancy is certainly on the wing, and she is not so entirely taken up with conventual occupations, as to forget a world in which she proposes to enjoy in due time so much pleasure.

The young ladies educated in convents, though secluded from public gaieties, are not debarred the visits of their relations; not only their mothers, aunts, fathers, and uncles, but

also their brothers, and other young gentlemen near a-kin to their families, are allowed to see them occasionally.

These visits are often attended with a great deal of cheerfulness, and even merriment. Notwithstanding the room where the company meets, is divided by an iron grate, no male being ever admitted within the precinct of such houses, yet there is space enough left between the bars, to shake hands, and to help the guests to a glass of wine, a dish of coffee, or a plate of fruit, or any other refreshment.

Here the young ladies, whose brothers and male relations wait upon them, are frequently accompanied by such of the other young ladies living in the convent as are their intimates. This naturally produces acquaintance, and, in course of time, friendship, and liking of each other's company, in the youths who visit, and the young ladies who are visited.

I need not tell you that love often steals into these societies; perhaps oftener than into any other.

Figure to yourself on the one side, youth, innocence, and beauty cloistered and separated from those, for whose homage and felicity they
were

were designed : on the other side, view those for whom these lovely objects were formed, admitted to gaze on them through bars of iron, and only suffered, as it were, to see a treasure of which they know the value, and are in a manner invited to demand and attempt the possession.

Difficulties always enhance the worth of what we desire to obtain. For this reason courtships that are carried on through obstacles, are much warmer than those that pass with smoothness and facility.

Conformably to this, it is very customary for the young ladies, shut up in nunneries in France, to meet with the most ardent addresses from the young gentlemen with whom they become acquainted in those places.

I have heard a very sensible woman say, that she was fully persuaded the most happy unions were commenced in this manner ; and that she was authorised in her opinion, by the instances of this nature that had happened within the circle of her own knowledge and information,

It may be added by way of corroboration, that there is a female monastery in France, celebrated for having furnished the world with a number of excellent wives. This is the famous con-

convent of St. Cyr, founded by Louis XIV, at the request of Madam de Maintenon.

The chief purport of its institution is to educate the daughters of noble families reduced by accidents and misfortunes, in a manner worthy of their birth. The number of young ladies brought up in this house amounts to no less than 300; they are treated with the utmost care and tenderness; and at the age of twenty are dismissed with a very decent provision,

The excellent education they receive, added to the respectableness of their origin, of which they are obliged to make authentic proof before their reception, induces many a gentleman to seek for a partner among the ladies of St. Cyr, as they are denominated.

Thus it appears, that the notion of young gentlemen in the army being too volatile to fix their serious attention on any woman, and that the young ladies in convents have no opportunities of forming engagements with young gentlemen, are equally destitute of foundation.

The licentiousness that follows the marriages above described is not surprising; initiated at once into all the gayeties and freedoms of grandeur and opulence, without any previous preparation,

paration, and linked, in spite of herself, with one who is not the man of her choice, the wife soon launches into pleasure and dissipation, and learns by the contagion of bad example to chuse an admirer of her own approving.

Her husband, on the other hand, as little attached to her as she to him, has recourse to amusements abroad, in order to indemnify himself for the little satisfaction he receives at home.

In this manner passes the life of too many a married couple among the upper classes in France; owing, doubtless, principally to this coercive system that prevails among the great in matrimonial affairs.

When I call it coercive, I say nothing that facts will not amply warrant.

The coercion indeed does not so much affect the man, who, if uninclined to the match proposed, is perhaps on no worse a footing on that account, than a young man averse to the choice of his parents, might find himself in England.

But this tyrannising spirit is severely felt by the poor women; and falls heavily on those who

have the resolution to withstand parental commands.

In this respect, the authority sometimes exercised by unrelenting parents, is truly grievous : the laws empower them by no means to force the inclinations of their children ; but such is the power of custom, that disobedience in these matters is punished, sometimes, as if it were a crime of the blackest die.

Various are the ways of reeking their resentment, which parents may have recourse to on these occasions ; but the most usual is confinement in a monastery ; which, I dare say, you will think a sufficient mortification for having committed no sort of offence.

When a helpless young woman sees no other alternative before her than a husband or a convent, how is it possible she should hesitate in making her option ! Surely any husband, where indifference alone is the objection, is preferable to imprisonment for life.

In England the rights of human nature are not subject to so scandalous a violation ; and tho' the loss of fortune may, now and then, be the consequence of a young woman's refusal to be guided in such instances, that only is the very
worst

worst that can befall her; as her heart is free, her person remains sacred and inviolable; she preserves uninvaded the liberty of bestowing both wherever she thinks proper; and is not liable either to chastisement or censure, for disposing of herself according to her inclinations.

LETTER X.

On the French Nunneries—Story of two young Ladies.

HAVING in my preceding letter mentioned the use that is occasionally made of these houses, I will now examine to what purposes in general they were instituted, and of what utility such institutions may be to the community.

I will begin by observing that they are amazingly numerous throughout all France; Paris alone contains seventy.

There are in that kingdom upwards of fifteen thousand monasteries and convents, of which about the half are appropriated to women.

Dissertations without end have been made on the utility and inutility of such foundations. Men of philosophic minds, who consider things merely as conducive to the temporal welfare of human society, universally agree in reprobating them as the pests of mankind, on the footing they have been during so many centuries.

It

It cannot be denied, that most of these institutions had their birth in the ages of ignorance and superstition ; this alone, with many, is a sufficient argument to condemn them without hesitation.

But as these ages have also produced some establishments beneficial to society, it were unjust and rash to level one's indignation promiscuously at whatever originated in those times.

Motives of piety and religion were almost always the causes of their foundation : though men were very much misguided in general on these occasions, yet sometimes it happened that they acted very properly, and instead of being censurable, were truly the benefactors of the public.

Among those few religious institutions that merit applause, the Trinitarians and Charitable Brethren, among the men, and the Ursulines, and Charitable Sisters, among the women, are perhaps the only that ought to be retained, as of real utility to the state ; were all the others suppressed, without or with very little exception, it would be a highly meritorious deed in those who could effect it.

Those

Those two orders among the men, have certainly a most humane and laudable aim in view. The first is employed in the redemption of those christians, who have been made captives by the infidels, and are detained in slavery at Constantinople, in Turkish Asia, and among the piratical states on the coast of Barbary.

The employment of the Charitable Brethren, is still more fatiguing and laborious: their profession is to attend the sick: to this intent their convents are in fact hospitals, wherein poor people, who are unable to take care of themselves at home, receive gratis every help and comfort they can wish for. This may truly be called christian charity.

The institute of the Charitable Sisters is formed precisely on the model of the Charitable Brethren; they perform the same duties to the women which the others do to the men.

The generality of the other orders, both of men and women, might certainly be very well dispensed with; they contribute to thin countries of their inhabitants, without rendering them any service which they might not have done much better by remaining in the world.

If

If good policy militates against the seclusion of men from public life, it certainly must oppose, with much more reason, the incarceration of women.

Men, though pent up in solitude, may still, in some measure, not be wholly lost to the state; they often spend their lives in speculations from which much benefit may be reaped: they cultivate literature and the sciences. Had it not been for the inhabitants of monasteries, during the Gothic ages, what would have become of Greek and Roman learning?

In this point of view, the total extirpation of monastics is not desirable. There are many individuals, of a solitary contemplative disposition, who delight in study and in literary occupations; and who may become very useful members of the community, though they are not inclined to mix in the bustle and business of active life. Witness our own universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

A moderate number of houses for the reception and maintenance of such individuals, will never prejudice the state, provided that a strict examination is made of the talents and pretensions of those who desire admittance. The two places last mentioned are proofs of this, and may serve as no improper models.

But

But nothing of this sort can be alledged in favour of those receptacles, wherein so many women are buried alive, and absolutely lost to the world.

The purposes of their retreat from mankind, are to dedicate their lives to prayer and pious contemplations, and to avoid those temptations to which they would have been exposed, had they remained in the world at large.

But who does not see that if these arguments were valid, we ought all of us to fly to convents and monasteries? No person has a greater right to take refuge there than another. We are all bound to submit to the chances and dangers accruing to morals from social intercourse: true virtue consists in combating and overcoming them, and not in flying from a scene of action, wherein we are equally obliged to act our part with the rest of our fellow creatures.

But let us not be deceived by false pretences. Motives of piety do often, undoubtedly, conduct women into convents; but it is, on the other hand, no less indubitable that motives of another kind are powerfully conducive in sending females to these places.

Pride

Pride and avarice, those great perverters of human nature, operate most forcibly in favour of these institutions.

When a noble family happens to multiply beyond the means it possesses of settling its progeny in a state of grandeur and affluence, the first idea that occurs, is to dispose of the females in a convent.

Hence those places are so plentifully stocked with unhappy young women of good families, who may with great propriety be denominated the supernumeraries of ambition. Their residence in the world would necessarily diminish the fortunes of those who are destined to remain in it, and to whose conveniency they are so often sacrificed in the most unrelenting manner.

It were not perhaps uncharitable to assert, that as many nuns are made among the great, from this base and meer worldly motive, as from views of religion.

I have heard various stories in corroboration of this opinion: I will select one for your amusement, which I have every reason to believe authentic.

A noble and ancient family, in one of the interior provinces of France, had a great number

ber of children. The daughters especially were a heavy burthen on the family income; which, though very decent, was inadequate to any design of giving them each a portion sufficiently considerable to procure them a settlement fit for their birth.

The young ladies, as too usual in France in these cases, were sent into convents, and only one reserved at home.

This was the eldest, for whom, it seems, they hoped to find a husband in a young Count; whose estate lay contiguous to theirs, and who was not only a near relation, but had often expressed a desire of being more nearly related.

He was very rich and highly connected; one of his uncles had a considerable place at Court; and, having no children, had declared the young Count his heir.

These flattering prospects made him the idol of all the ambitious families where he was acquainted; and induced them of course to use all their endeavours to obtain him for a son-in-law.

One of the daughters above-mentioned, after a stay of some years in a convent, grew tired of her

her situation, and prevailed upon her parents to take her home.

She was an insinuating artful girl, and by her dexterity had gained an ascendancy over her mother, by whose persuasions the father consented that she should leave her confinement.

But the youngest was not so fortunate; she had often requested to be freed from the disagreeable abode she was in; but her letters, though full of the most pathetic entreaties, were always disregarded, and very seldom answered.

Worn out with impatience at such treatment, she ventured to utter some spirited complaints in a letter to one of her aunts; but this lady very injudiciously shewed it to her father, whom it exasperated much more than it could move.

He was a man of a morose and brutal disposition, intoxicated with ideas of his consequence, and that of his family, interested to the supreme degree, and ready to sacrifice every consideration to its aggrandizement.

His wife was a woman of the same character, proud, haughty, unfeeling, and made up of ill-nature and vanity.

H

These

These were not persons from whom much was to be expected through pity and supplication. The poor young lady accordingly having continued to remonstrate in vain, during a long space of time, lost her hopes and her health, and fell dangerously ill.

Louisa, that was her name, was at this period in the bloom of opening beauty; she was turned of sixteen, perfectly well made, and possessed an air of loveliness and dignity together, that made her the favourite of all her acquaintance. Several gentlewomen had interceded in her behalf for a total release from the convent, and an introduction to the world; sure as they were, that so handsome and accomplished a young lady would never want admirers.

But the obstinacy of the father was proof against all petitions in her favour. In this he was joined by the mother, who with equal hardness of heart, rejected all expostulations, and insisted that a nunnery should be her portion.

Her illness, however, and the imminent danger they were informed she was in, obliged them at last to remove her home, and to treat her with some appearance of kindness.

As

As she was a girl of excellent temper, full of sweetness, and good nature, this seeming return of parental affection made so powerful an impression upon her, that she quickly recovered her health and spirits.

But the consequences of this recovery were far from favourable to her. Determined at all events to sacrifice her to their ambitious views, her parents again prepared to remand her back to her imprisonment. The first proposal they made to her on this subject, affected her so much, that she fainted away, and was with much difficulty brought to her senses.

Convinced that to force her to return to that odious spot, would be instant death to her, they desisted from the attempt, and took the resolution to prevail upon her to comply, by other means, than those they had used hitherto.

Deceit was now called in to their assistance; they pretended that the addresses of the young Count to her eldest sister, would not continue long, if he once perceived that her fortune was less than they had at first apprized him; that it was therefore necessary they should feign she was destined to pass her life in a convent, otherwise her sister would miss of a splendid settlement;

which she certainly must lose all hopes of, if three daughters were to divide the fortune, which the Count had long been made to believe was only the property of one.

They promised most solemnly at the same time, that as soon as the marriage had taken place, she should be at liberty to quit her retirement, and should live at large without any farther restraint on her person, or her inclinations.

Won by these promises, and by a variety of presents, which they took care to make her on this occasion, she consented at length to repair to her former mansion. Both father and mother attended her thither; and behaved with so much outward tenderness at parting, that they left her fully convinced she might rely on all they had said.

In the mean time, Narcissa, that sister who had found means to deliver herself from her monastic fetters, began to appear a troublesome guest to her parents.

Whether the young Count grew cool in his attendance on the eldest, or whether her father and mother were apprehensive of such an event, they had already cast a disapproving eye on her presence

presence in the family; and would willingly have dispatched her to the same confinement with Louisa; had they not apprehended, that being more knowing, she would have not only refused compliance herself, but induced her sister to join in the refusal.

After consulting in what manner to proceed with Narcissa, they determined to attempt a plot with her, of a deeper, as well as of a blacker die, than that which had succeeded with her sister.

After loading her with caresses, and persuading her that she was the confidential possessor of all their secrets, they told her, as a proof of the high trust which they reposed in her, that they proposed to make her the instrument of the design which they had resolved to carry into execution respecting her sister Louisa.

They represented to Narcissa, that the invincible obstinacy of that sister, made it requisite to assail her by artifice, and to draw her imperceptibly into those measures, which otherwise it was clear she would never embrace.

The stratagem they proposed, was, that Narcissa should repair to the convent, on a visit, as it were, to Louisa; where after two or

three weeks or a month's stay, they would come down on a pretence to bring her home; but that, in the mean time, she should make it her business, to converse as much as possible with Louisa, on the Count's courtship to their eldest sister, and convince her by every argument she could think of, that his avaricious disposition hindered him from concluding the business, while he saw both her younger sisters in a way to claim a share of that fortune, which, he had been given to understand, was to have been entirely settled upon her alone.

In order to make the stronger impression on the mind of Louisa, Narcissa was to tell her, that in consequence of these considerations, she had taken the determination to absent herself from home, and to feign a liking to a monastic life, the sooner to bring her sister's marriage to a conclusion. That possibly, the Count, on seeing both the youngest sisters withdrawn from the world, would hesitate no longer, and terminate the business which the family wished so ardently to see completed.

Fraught with these instructions, and prepared to execute them by every promisory view, which both her father and mother industriously held out on this occasion, she hastened to the convent; where she found Louisa beginning to tire

tire with her situation, and panting for that liberty, of which the little she had tasted at home some months before, had given her a very great relish.

Narcissa did not fail, according to the injunctions she had received, to behave with all the artifice of which she was mistress, and to work upon the mind of her artless sister with so much dexterity, as to persuade her it was for their interest, as well as that of their eldest sister, to remain in the nunnery until she was actually married.

On the father and mother's coming to fetch her home, according to appointment, she acted the part agreed upon to admiration; and brought her sister Louisa into her measures so completely, that their parents returned home, entirely satisfied with the success of their stratagem.

In the mean time, from whatever causes it might proceed, the marriage of the eldest sister was protracted from day to day, and the Count did not seem to betray the least impatience on that account.

But the young Lady's parents began to lose all their patience, and were no longer able to refrain

refrain from carrying the design they had framed, relative to the two other daughters, into the speediest execution.

They went to the convent, and informed the two sisters, that it was absolutely necessary for the acceleration of their sister's marriage with the Count, to act a still more explicit part than they had done hitherto, and to close the comedy they had begun, by taking the veil, and pretending to become nuns in good earnest.

This, you will readily conceive, was no agreeable message to either of them. Louisa opposed it first with great spirit and vehemence; but Narcissa offering to lead the way in this disagreeable business, she with much difficulty consented to the proposal made to them, after having received the most positive assurances, that this should be the last act of the deceitful performance imposed upon them.

The task they were now put upon, must certainly have been highly mortifying to young ladies in the prime of youth and beauty, and no ways inclined to the life they were now about to lead for perhaps a twelvemonth or even more.

Such

Such is the usual space allotted to that trial, which in convents is called the Noviciate. On its expiration, it is expected that they who have gone through it, should either enter into a solemn engagement for life, or else depart from the convent.

It is usual, at the same time, for those who become Novices, whether men or women, to cut off their hair. This, you well know, is a great sacrifice to a French woman ; who takes uncommon pride in that appendage of comeliness, and parts with it, therefore, with infinite reluctance.

This loss must have been particularly felt by the two young ladies ; had their real intentions been what they outwardly appeared, the deprivation of that ornament would have been of no consequence to them, in a place where they were to be hidden from the sight of men ; but expecting to be delivered from the tribulations they were undergoing for the sake of their sister, as soon as the Count had married her, the prospect of appearing in society without that necessary appurtenance to gaiety, must have very much affected them.

Narcissa, you see, had gone great lengths in her endeavours to circumvent Louisa. Every motive that her parents could frame, was adduced
on

on this occasion ; they assured her, that a few months should terminate her captivity, and that on her feigning a fit of illness, they would immediately recall her home.

Filled with these hopes, and with the expectation of that portion which was to go to Louisa, on her remaining a nun, Narcissa cheerfully co-operated with the views of her parents on her poor sister.

But exclusive of Narcissa, another person was to be won over to assist in this affair. This was the Lady Abbess of the monastery, in which they now were novices. She was accordingly made participant of the ultimate resolutions adopted by the parents of the young ladies.

This abbess, on the first opening of the business, was by no means inclined to second the intentions of these hard-hearted people. The enormity of the treatment they inflicted on their children, was too visible to meet with her immediate concurrence ; and it was not till they had assured her in the strongest terms, that they were not in circumstances to provide otherwise for them, that she consented to be accessory to their designs.

Near

Near half the noviciate was expiring, when Narcissa, vexed at seeing no end to the Count's courtship, petitioned for a release from confinement, and feigned an illness, as she had been allowed.

But this answered no other purpose, than to bring her parents to the convent to visit her, and to make fresh assurances of their favourable intentions relative to her.

On the expiration of the eleventh and entrance into the twelfth month of their noviciate, Louisa began to be alarmed at her situation, and exclaimed loudly against the barbarity of their treatment; threatening to endure it no longer, and to throw off the habit she had only assumed in compliance to her parents.

Narcissa herself was not pleased with these repeated delays; and could hardly contain her discontent within the bounds of the dissimulation she had hitherto preserved.

But the time was come that her parents had looked for to dissemble no longer themselves. They came to the convent, and told Louisa, that after the maturest deliberation, they saw no other method of rendering the family happy, than by her embracing the monastic state, and continuing

continuing to wear the habit she had assumed ; that she had better do it with a good grace, than adhere to a refusal, which they gave her to understand would be unavailing ; that by complying cheerfully with their request, she would gain and experience their good-will in a manner that would render her situation pleasing and comfortable in the highest degree ; that every accommodation suitable to her state should be found her with the utmost kindness and liberality ; and that in short, every favour and indulgence should be shewn her that she could ask or wish for.

Louisa was a girl of excellent sense, as well as of exquisite feelings. She had not lived so long in a convent, without being perfectly acquainted what sort of happiness and satisfaction is to be found in such places.

Nature had formed her for society and pleasure, and a monastery was the last thing in her thoughts. Her mind was full of that liveliness which keeps every passion on the wing, and her whole appearance shewed her born for every enjoyment of life.

To a young person of this frame, such a proposal was like a clap of thunder ; it bereaved her for a while of sense and motion ; she was
carried

carried to her cell, and confined to her bed several days.

This however had no effect on her parents; they left her to the care of Narcissa, fully resolved not to recede from their determinations.

As soon as they heard that she was recovered, and somewhat composed, they returned and insisted peremptorily on her compliance.

She threw herself at their feet, and implored their commiseration in the most moving terms: she offered, in case they would relent, to give up all expectation of fortune, and to make her portion over to her other sisters: she required no more than a bare maintenance, and to be suffered to live in the plainest manner; promising faithfully to act with all deference to their commands in domestic matters.

Instead of being softened by the prayers and tears of a lovely daughter submissively prostrate at his feet, the brutal father spurned her from him with the most shocking sternness: he threw himself into the most furious passion; and threatened, in case of further disobedience, to send her to a penitential house of confinement, at four or five hundred miles distance, where she should be shut up all her days.

You

You will perhaps think it strange that any man should make such threats, or that having made, he should be able to execute them. But parental authority is sometimes in France, and in other countries abroad, carried to great extremities. It is a remnant of that dreadful power which parents formerly possessed over their children, even in the freest states. The youth of Greece and Rome were not free from this terrible bondage; much less were those of other countries not so polite and civilized.

A menace of this nature silenced at once the unhappy Louisa, and left her no alternative between immediate obedience and the worst of misery.

After having disposed of Louisa in this manner, it was now Narcissa's turn to learn her own destiny.

Her parents began by expressing their regret at the behaviour of the Count, who notwithstanding his seeming attachment to their eldest sister, was perpetually enquiring whether her two sisters had made their vows, and bound themselves formally to a continuance of the profession they had embraced. They saw that nothing short of this would ever induce him to marry her; that it was much against their inclination

nation to part with so discreet and prudent a child ; but they flattered themselves from her moderation and good sense, that she would, as well as they, perceive the necessity of the measures they had planned for the general good of the family, and hoped therefore she would acquiesce, in conjunction with her sister Louisa, in the earnest desire and request of her parents, that they should both embrace a monastic life.

Such a speech struck Narcissa with the utmost astonishment ; she remained some minutes confounded and speechless, and hardly mistress of her senses.

She now perceived how grossly she had been deceived : she saw the drift of all the pretended bounties, and feigned caresses she had lately experienced ; but what sunk deepest into her heart, she saw too plainly that she had entangled herself past all deliverance.

When she had recollected herself, finding that resistance would be vain, she promised implicit acquiescence ; and only begged that she and her sister might be allowed a short space of time to compose their minds, and prepare themselves for the great and unexpected change they were now to undergo for the residue of their lives.

This

This was granted, and after making every promise of future indulgence and kindness consistent with the nature of a monastic life, their parents took leave of them, with every demonstration of tenderness they were able to feign.

As soon as they were gone, and the two unfortunate sisters retired to their cell, Narcissa fell on her knees before Louisa; and with a flood of tears acknowledged the part she had acted throughout the whole transaction; asking her forgiveness with every mark of the deepest contrition.

Louisa, whose soul was all tenderness and magnanimity, embraced Narcissa in the most affectionate manner, and gave her every assurance of an entire forgiveness and reconciliation.

Narcissa, though she had condescended to be an instrument of deceit, was not so far depraved, as to be insensible of her guilt. She now sincerely repented the baseness of her conduct; and took a resolution to exert herself to the utmost, in order, if possible, to extricate her sister as well as herself.

Louisa, whose tender disposition had sunk her into the most violent grief and affliction, gave herself up to weeping and lamentation; and
was

was so wofully dejected, as to reject all consolation.

But Narcissa, who felt no less the indignity of the treatment they both suffered, did not submit to the like degree of despondency. As she was older and more conversant in the world, she had also acquired sagacity and resolution, and was determined to try all she could to defeat the purpose of her unnatural parents.

Instead of unavailingly deploring the severity of their fate, she advised her sister to collect her spirits, and prepare for an attempt to escape from the prison, wherein they were so undeservedly confined.

Louisa was not backward in acceding to this proposal; and though not so fertile in expedients as her sister, shewed every readiness to concur in any scheme that might seem practicable.

After holding a variety of consultations in what manner to effect their escape, and whither to fly, after effecting it, they agreed on the following.

Among the many intercessors in favour of Louisa's emancipation, there was a young cousin, the intimate friend and companion of her infancy, who had passed several years in that

I

convent

convent wherein she was now inclosed : that cousin had lately left it, in order to be married: her husband happened at this time to be absent with his regiment in Germany, in the army under the command of the Marshal Contayes; which, by the by, fixes the epocha of this transaction to the year fifty-nine.

In the absence of her husband, this young lady was settled in the family of an aunt, a woman of great good nature and humanity, and who highly disapproved of the treatment of her other niece Louisa.

Both these ladies had often hinted, they would be happy in the company of Louisa, if she could prevail on her parents to permit her to live with them. The aunt, in particular, who was a widow and had no children, had always professed a remarkable partiality for her.

To this aunt and cousin Louisa proposed to her sister they should fly for refuge; not doubting they would either keep or conceal them from the resentment and rage of their father, of which they well knew they should experience the most outrageous degree, on his hearing of their flight.

Having

Having thus concerted a place of retreat, the next point was to contrive how to make their way out of the convent.

It was a strong and ancient building: it had been constructed at the time when civil dissensions were frequent in France; and had been formerly surrounded with a broad moat, now converted into orchards and gardens, beyond which there was an outer wall, beside that which inclosed the convent itself.

The sight of these difficulties did not however discourage them. The greatest obstacle to surmount was a large mastiff, chained in the day, but let out during the night, and whose vigilance in the garden rendered it impassable without immediate notice.

It was therefore thought advisable, to make their attempt before the close of the day, after the last evening song was over; when the nuns would all be retired to their cells, and no person would be stirring in any part of the house.

After having thrown off their monastic habit, and put on a convenient dress, they sallied forth accordingly in the dusk of the evening, and proceeded to the chapel, where, it seems, they had observed the windows were low enough, to let

themselves into that garden which had formerly been the mote.

When arrived there, the next business was to find a ladder, which they had some days before perceived to be used for the purpose of gathering fruit from the trees.

In the mean time, an elderly nun, whose office it was to walk the round of the Dormitory, as it is called, and to knock at the door of every cell, coming to that of the two sisters, and receiving no answer, immediately alarmed the Lady Abbess, who repaired to their chamber.

No answer being returned to her, any more than to the other, the door was opened by the common key that is always in that lady's possession, and by which she lets herself into every person's apartment whenever she pleases.

On finding them gone, she ordered the alarm bell to be rung, and dispatched all the lay sisters in quest of the fugitives.

These two unfortunate young ladies, after a long search, had at last found the ladder they had so much wanted; but several of the steps were missing, and they were obliged to make the best use of it they could in this imperfect condition,

condition, not however till they had lost time in seeking for them.

The delay occasioned by this search proved fatal : they were on the point of applying the ladder to the outer wall, when two of the most active of the lay-sisters came up with them.

These immediately seized and detained them, till the others came up ; they were then brought back into the convent ; and notwithstanding all their tears and lamentations, locked up in separate chambers during the ensuing night.

Next day the Abbess sent their parents word of what had happened.

It is impossible to describe the savage fury of the father on this occasion. Had they been the most abandoned of wretches, his usage of them could not have been worse : he loaded them with all manner of abuse ; and without deigning to explain his intentions, he left them with a solemn menace they should never see his face again.

Had the Abbess retained the least spark of religion or honesty, she must undoubtedly have insisted on the restoration of liberty to these innocent young women, who had done nothing but

but what they were fully warranted in by the laws of God and man.

But instead of hearkening to any suggestions of pity or duty, that worthless woman basely consented, from lucrative motives, as it afterwards appeared, to continue the vile instrument of barbarity which their inexorable parents had found in her.

In order to sanctify the farce she had projected, a solemn chapter was held of all the nuns in the convent : both mothers and sisters, that is to say, both old and young were called together ; and the two young ladies were produced before them like culprits to receive their sentence.

Narcissa had courage enough to plead her cause before this assembly : she frankly acknowledged the duplicity of which she had been guilty, and declared that neither she nor Louisa had one moment entertained the least idea of becoming nuns ; and that what they had both done was in pure compliance with the injunctions of their parents.

But this justification availed nothing : she was told, that notwithstanding her intentions to the contrary, her exterior conduct made her liable to be

be considered as a member of the community of which she had so long worn the dress ; that having scandalized it in the grossest manner, she was according to the statutes in force upon such cases, amenable to punishment.

In pursuance of this declaration, the Abbess condemned them both to receive every morning a dozen of stripes with a discipline, to be daily repeated while they remained in the convent ; telling them at the same time, that they had rendered themselves unworthy of any mercy from their parents, who had delivered them up to her discretion, during the short stay they were to make in the convent ; from whence they would soon be removed to a place of much severer confinement, and harder living.

On the next morning the execution of this inhuman sentence took place : two lay-sisters inflicted it upon them, in the most unfeeling manner.

These lay-sisters are exactly the counterpart of the lay-brothers in the monasteries of Monks and Friars : they are generally, both men and women, people of low birth, low education, and consequently of coarse ideas.

They

They are employed in the menial offices of the houses they belong to, and undergo all the drudgery of the meanest domestics, being in fact no better than servants and labourers.

Into such hands it was the lot of Narcissa and Louisa now to fall.

Three mornings did the delicate frames of these two young ladies endure the infliction of this torture ; which no doubt was by the direction of their cruel parents : the Abbess never had durst proceed to such extremities without their most positive injunctions : the father was a man of too much consequence to have adopted such measures without them.

The poor young ladies, however, not knowing where all this would end, and being debarred the use of pen, ink and paper, as well as the sight of all visitors, began to envisage their condition with horror, and to entertain the most desperate ideas.

Narcissa, who was less patient than her sister, told the nun who presided at these executions, that if they did not cease speedily, she knew how to put an end to them herself.

This

This being reported to the Abbess, she desisted from scourging them; but ordered they should still continue under lock and key, and no person whatever be admitted to speak to them.

In this wretched condition they remained some days; when the Abbess thinking they were sufficiently prepared for what she proposed, sent an artful nun to converse with them and sift their intentions, and to discover whether the sufferings they had gone through, had disposed them to accept of any alternative, sooner than meet with a repetition.

This crafty woman found them just in the situation she could wish, drowned in tears and bewailing themselves in the most piteous manner: affecting the sincerest sorrow for their misfortunes, she told them that a letter had that very day been remitted to the Abbess from their father; wherein he signified, that she should not abate in the least of the rigorous usage of his unworthy daughters, as he styled them; that he insisted they should be kept apart from each other, fed on bread and water, and locked up in dungeons, if there were any in the convent.

Such excess of cruelty threw the unfortunate young ladies into a greater agony of despair than ever;

ever: they flung themselves on the ground before this nun, and besought her to intercede with the Abbess in their behalf, offering to do implicitly whatever she should order them.

The nun withdrew, and gave an account to the Abbess of the disposition she had left them in, and of the facility there now was to mould them into any form she thought proper.

In truth the two sisters were now convinced that it was vain to contend any longer with their destiny: cruel as it was, they both agreed to yield to it with as good a grace as they were able.

They sent their humble request to the Abbess, that she would forgive what was past, and overlook a misdemeanour that was prompted by youth and folly, and which they would endeavour to atone for by a behaviour conformable to what should be required of them.

Thus did these unhappy young ladies bow themselves down before oppression, and make a seeming virtue of the dire necessity they were driven to, of either obeying the tyrannical mandates of their barbarous parents, or of being imprisoned like felons all the rest of their lives.

The

The Abbess now gloried in the victory she had obtained over these helpless young women: she informed their parents of the new turn things had taken: In consequence of which they desired her to inform their daughters, that when they had fulfilled their promises, then, but not before, they should be forgiven and received again into favour.

The only remedy to the various evils they had been threatened with, was therefore adopted; they demanded re-admittance into the state they had quitted, with a solemn assurance of making the usual vows, and consecrating themselves to a monastic life,

They were re-admitted accordingly; and in a few days they took the irrevocable oath, and made their profession with the usual formalities.

Narcissa was at this time a little more than twenty years of age, and though less beautiful than Louisa, was allowed to be very handsome.

Whether they were ever visited either by their father or their mother, after this dreadful sacrifice, I never could learn. Possibly the shame and remorse of having treated their children with so much inhumanity, may, when too late, have operated

operated upon their conscience, and made them averse to behold the innocent and unfortunate objects of their criminal inflexibility.

If, on the contrary, the wishes of this wicked couple went to a total discharge of all sort of incumbrance upon account of these unhappy children, they were very speedily gratified.

Soon after their profession, Narcissa, overcome with grief and repentance at having deceived her sister, lost all peace of mind, and fell into a decline that carried her off about a twelvemonth after.

She died in the arms of Louisa, imploring her forgiveness with her last breath.

The tender-hearted and noble-minded Louisa had not only forgiven her, but convinced of the sincerity of her contrition, she loved her with the warmest affection: she clasped her to her bosom in her dying moments; called her by every endearing name, and told her in the most moving and pathetic terms, that she felt an inward assurance she should not long survive her.

Her prediction was very soon verified: she sickened a few days after the death of Narcissa,
for

for the loss of whom she became inconsolable; while she was alive, they were a comfort to each other; the deprivation of her was a blow which her sensibility could not brook: there now remained no individual in whom she could repose any confidence: the treatment she had met with in that house rendered it odious; and the necessity of passing her life in it aggravated the horrors of such a situation: she shunned all society, and became a prey to silence and melancholy: her beautiful form wasted gradually to a skeleton; and she died at last six or seven months after Narcissa, and was at her earnest desire buried in the same grave.

I will make no comment upon this doleful story. I shall leave it to you, to make those reflexions upon it, which reason and humanity will not fail to suggest.

L E T.

LETTER XI.

On the Education in French Nunneries.

WERE I inclined to expatiate on subjects of the same nature as that which concluded my last letter, I can assure you that matter would not be wanting. Barbarities of this kind, though not indeed so outrageous, are daily committed in France; and doubtless in all those countries where nunneries are established.

From these instances, which are, unhappily, too frequent, one may justly infer, that a large proportion of the inhabitants of nunneries are strictly and literally no better than prisoners.

How can it be otherwise, when it is a common practice in families, whose pride is greater than their wealth, to sacrifice as many of the females as they cannot provide for in a sumptuous manner, to this wretched system of imprisonment and celibacy.

I do not exactly know at what age a noviciate is allowed to begin, and whether it is suffered to last longer than a twelvemonth; but of this

this I am certain, that a young girl may legally bind herself formally by vows when she is fifteen; by which it is clear that she may commence novice at only one year younger, if not sooner.

But an admittance into a nunnery on the footing of boarder, is limited to no age: children of seven, and perhaps less, are taken into convents on that footing: as the intentions of many parents are that they should remain there all their lives, they rightly conclude that they cannot too soon habituate them to a recluse and solitary life.

Herein they are always very well seconded by the nuns into whose hands they commit the trust of their children. One cannot help on this occasion recalling to one's mind the maxim, that companions in misfortune help to lessen it.

These nuns, as if they had this maxim perpetually in their eye, exert all their art in giving their innocent and artless pupils a distaste for the world, and infusing into their minds a predilection for a conventual life.

They represent the first as teeming with innumerable dangers to virtue: they are ever industriously depicting in the most odious colours
the

the conduct of those females who are guilty of irregularities, and magnifying the smallest failings into enormities. In short, they leave no method untried to describe human society as a scene of constant iniquity, and those who live in it as in a state where it is unspeakably difficult to secure one's future salvation.

Such are the ideas they are incessantly impressing on the imagination of the young and inexperienced, in order to wean them from any desire of returning to the comforts and freedoms of public life.

On the other hand, they are no less dextrous in painting in the most charming light, the safe and tranquil pleasures of a monastic habitation; the certainty of meeting with none of those calamities that embitter the most brilliant situations, and from which they derive so often a perpetuity of misery; the plenty, not only of the necessaries, but even of the comforts and elegancies of an easy and peaceable maintenance, divested of all solicitude for futurity, and even of all hardship and disquietude in their present procuring.

These and many other motives are laid before them with amazing art and sagacity; and as there is undoubtedly some truth in these representations,

presentations, though involved in a mist of false colouring, yet as they have only meer children to contend with, 'tis not in the least surprizing, they should so completely circumvent and deceive them.

In the mean while, to preserve their ignorance from being contaminated with the knowledge of the transactions of social life, they are seldom suffered to go out of the convent; and are constantly employed in reading books of devotion, or in such occupations as afford them no opportunities of hearing or learning any thing that relates to business out of doors.

This is chiefly meant of those whom their parents destine for nuns, and whom they consequently wish to form betimes for that condition, by using every means they can devise to extinguish in them as soon as possible, all ideas and desires of the things of this world.

As to the young ladies that are placed in these houses for the purpose of education, they are allowed more liberty; they go oftener abroad, receive more frequent visits, and are permitted to read books of worldly instruction and entertainment.

K

Neither

Neither are all these places deficient in persons who have seen the polite world, and are able of course to instil proper notions of it.

It sometimes happens that women of fashion in the decline of life, or even ladies yet in the pride of their beauty and splendour, will occasionally take up a transient residence in convents.

The motives that usually lead them thither, are either some family loss or misfortune, such as the death of a husband, or a near relation, a disadvantageous change of circumstances, or possibly a fit of devotion.

Whatever the causes may be that ever induce ladies of this description to retire awhile into convents, certain it is, they are the most useful acquaintance those young ladies can form there, whose future destination is for polite life.

In the company of such, many an accomplished female character has received its first lessons : it is indeed principally owing to such, that some convents owe the celebrity they possess, of sending forth young ladies, completely qualified to become in time women of exemplary eminence in the stations for which they are designed.

The

The fact is, that houses noted for the good education conferred upon young gentlewomen of birth and fortune, are always monasteries of note, to which only ladies of fashion will repair, whenever they think proper to make a temporary retreat from the public.

It should not be forgotten, that elderly gentlewomen of small fortunes often constantly reside there, in whose company and conversation much improvement may be obtained.

In such convents as these, young ladies may be properly educated, so far as respects reading, ingenious occupations, and polite conversation.

But still let us remember, that even this is not due to the nuns, under whose authority they are placed; were they alone to superintend their education, it must be pitifully defective: little is the knowledge, of any real utility, which a young lady can obtain in the company of women, who must not, from the very spirit of their institution, be conversant in what they are taught to look upon, as the follies and vanities of a miserable world.

Thus you see, that in whatever light we view the education of young women in nunneries, it is chiefly calculated to fit them for a conventual life, and is totally inadequate to qualify them for society; since the helps towards that end in such places, are merely adventitious, and in no wise resulting from the plans on which they were founded.

Another conclusion may be drawn from these premises, which is, that these houses are decoys for the female sex, where thousands of women are absolutely stolen from society, and rendered useless in every sense in which woman kind can be of utility.

If we view this matter in a political light, a number of reasons occur to reprobate the existence of nunneries.

Let us cast an eye on those countries where nunneries are not permitted to subsist: what a superior degree of industry do we find there in comparison of those where they are allowed!

In what a variety of shapes are women employed in such countries! What an infinity of useful occupations and businesses do they not manage with as much dexterity as the men themselves!

Is

Is it not therefore a public robbery of human nature, to deprive it of the multitudes that might be of general service in the various concerns of life ?

Were it not much more consistent with the good of the community, to invest those immense sums that are annually appropriated to the maintenance of female monasteries, in moderate annuities on young men and women of deserving character, who were desirous of being married.

Is it not more conformable to the views of Providence, as well as more conducive to the welfare and strength of the state, to lay out money for the perpetuation, than for the extinction of the human kind ?

The prospect of being able to provide for a part of one's family at free cost, militates with no less force against these conventual foundations.

This prospect must necessarily diminish the industry of parents in labouring for the establishment of their children.

It is well known that a spirit of industry is the greatest blessing that can befall a nation ;

whatever therefore tends to a diminution of it, may be compared to the plundering of a public treasure.

But setting aside political considerations, let us consider the subject relatively to the personal happiness of individuals.

They who take upon them to be advocates for convents and nunneries, insist that the space of time allowed for trial, is amply sufficient for people to feel their own pulse, and to decide on their inclinations.

This is an assertion without the least shadow of an argument to support it.

Did the laws interfere in such wise, as to permit none to enter upon this trial until they had attained to real maturity of years and discretion, then indeed it might more plausibly be said, that no constraint or circumvention had been used.

But when we reflect, that a simple inexperienced young creature, of no more than fourteen, is admissible to this probation, and may at the expiration of the year engage herself beyond a possibility of retracting, will any man have the effrontery to assert, that such a one is not enticed
and

and entrapped in a most scandalous and inhuman manner ?

It is not most assuredly at so tender an age, that individuals are able to fix upon any vocation, much less of so awful and tremendous a nature.

Neither are we capable at a much more advanced period, to fix irrevocably in many serious matters.

If, in their temporal affairs, people are not esteemed qualified to execute any thing of importance, until they are almost twice fourteen, what are we to think of those who pretend that one half of those years, and of that experience they bring, is sufficient to guide us in spiritual concerns !

Nonage, which in England ends at one and twenty, does not in France terminate till the age of twenty-five : thus you see that individuals are authorised to dispose of the weightiest object in life, their very persons, ten years before they are, in the eye of the law, thought capable of disposing of any part of their property.

LET-

LETTER XII.

On the various Orders of Nuns established in France.

AS you seem desirous of being acquainted with the different orders of nuns established throughout this kingdom, I will endeavour to satisfy your curiosity, so far as a person is able that entirely disapproves of such institutions, and cannot therefore have dedicated much of his time or attention to researches of this nature,

I shall begin by observing, as a general rule, that there is hardly a species or denomination of monks or friars, that has not its counterpart in some female institution of the same sort, allowing for the necessary differences, which must, by the laws of decorum, take place between the two sexes.

The most ancient and most numerous of female orders, is that of the Benedictine ladies. It is of equal date with the monks of the like appellation; which commenced in the middle of the sixth century in Italy. It spread itself in a short time

time over Europe, and is esteemed the richest of any female order. There are many considerable abbeys of these ladies in France, the principal income of which is held, in a manner of commendam, by ladies of the first distinction, sometimes by Princesses of the Blood Royal.

In opposition, as it were, to the Benedictine and other monastic ladies, who enjoy large revenues, and live in much elegance, there is an institute of a nature entirely different : its intention is not only to remove women out of public society, but to treat them in the most mortifying manner a penitential disposition could have devised.

They are denied every convenience and comfort of life. The softness and delicacy of the sex, instead of being a protection from needless austerity, seems, on the contrary, to have been considered by the superstitious founders of this unhappy order of females, as affording an additional facility in contriving ways and means to render their existence miserable, and to excite their sincerest wishes for a speedy dissolution.

Whoever is acquainted with the poor Clares, as they are very justly denominated, will acknowledge this description to be true.

It is to be observed that had the Clares been allowed to remain in the world, they would have been a great ornament to society.

It is strange that young innocent women, whose morals are irreproachable, should thus become the dupe of religious zeal, or rather indeed absurdity, and shut themselves up in houses of correction, as it were, to do penance for offences which they never committed.

But is it not more strange, that in a civilized country, in a polite nation, and in an enlightened age, such extravagancies should not only be tolerated, but even encouraged, and held out as meritorious to human nature, and highly acceptable to the deity !

The primitive severity of this institution was so excessive, that Pope Urban the Fifth, a man of learning and humanity, thought it necessary to offer a mitigation to such of the nuns as would accept of it ; which numbers did accordingly, and have since formed a particular branch of that order : but many still adhere to their ancient strictness, to the surprise much more than the edification of the sensible part of mankind.

About two centuries ago, while France was torn by civil dissensions, and the protestant party maintained its cause with equal vigour and success, some zealous monks and nuns of different orders, took a determination to reform the abuses that had, through remissness and the iniquity

iniquity of the times, gained footing among them.

This they did by way of atoning in some measure for the general depravity of the age; and to set an example to the world of a total detachment from those pursuits that were inconsistent with a monastic life.

They entered upon this business with a warmth and earnestness that astonished their contemporaries. They not only abstained from the eating of flesh, which is still the practice in many convents, but they even refrained from the use of wine: this latter regulation however did not last, as it was found too much for nature to bear in the midst of so many other austerities.

The nuns who have embraced this rigorous system of reformation, are called the Feullantines; and though not altogether so strict a class as the poor Clares, are next noted for their severity of living.

After laying before you the ridicule and absurdity of some female institutions, we may now proceed to the review of others that are of benefit to society.

I have

I have in a preceding letter mentioned the charitable sisters; which is doubtless a most laudable and exemplary vocation, worthy of all possible encouragement, and deserving of the highest remuneration; if those who dedicate themselves to it, sought any other end than the conscientious discharge of the duties they have undertaken to perform.

To the praise of the French women, this institution is very much diffused throughout the kingdom. There is no considerable town without an hospital; and there is hardly any hospital without some of these worthy women to attend it.

Next in utility are the Ursulines, whose profession is to teach at free cost the female children of the poorer sort. They also are very numerous and very deservedly respected.

There arose in France during the last century, and in the reign of Lewis the Fourteenth, another institution equally beneficial.

Two houses were founded for the reception of women of ill-fame. The one was for those whose confinement was involuntary; the other for such as were desirous of withdrawing themselves from their vicious courses. They were both

both properly endowed and regulated, and have been found of essential service to the community. They have proved the happy means of saving from misery and wretchedness of every kind, a multitude of those inferior victims of prostitution, whose lives are necessarily a scene of perpetual horrors, and whose condition affords them nothing but continual causes of affliction and repentance.

As the memory of individuals who have been useful to society, is intitled to notice and respect, it is not just to pass over in silence the lady to whose piety and munificence the last institution is owing. This is the more especially due to her, as her conduct on this occasion was attended by some circumstances that render it peculiarly remarkable.

The name of this celebrated lady was Madame de Miramion: she was of noble extraction, and had acquired great reputation in her youth by her beauty, virtue and accomplishments. She married into a very illustrious family, and became a model of conjugal perfection. Her husband dying while she was young, she was sought and courted by men of the first rank and fashion; but having previously determined never again to marry, their courtship and assiduities were ineffectual.

Among

Among the many suitors whom she refused, was the famous Count Buffi Rabutin, so well known by his wit, and his imprisonment in the Bastille, for the liberties he took in his writings with some great personages in the court of Lewis the Fourteenth.

He had conceived a violent passion for Madame de Miramion. As she testified no approbation of him, and repulsed his warmth with coldness and indifference, his pride overcame his reason: he carried her off by main force, thinking thereby to exclude all his rivals, and to compel her to accept of his hand. But this act of rashness did not succeed: she remained inexorable; and he was obliged to relinquish his prize.

When she had delivered herself from this impetuous lover, she openly declared her resolution to resist all solicitations of this nature, and to discard all persons who should address her to that effect.

She then made a vow of chastity; and invited as many other ladies as she knew to be charitably disposed, to co-operate with her, and employ their fortune in retrieving from distress, those unhappy young women who had been guilty of leading an irregular life. She sought them
out

out industriously throughout all places, and commissioned a variety of persons to assist her in this pious work. Whenever she saw a comely young woman in want, she never failed to relieve and protect her; if inclined to marry, she made it her business to seek out a decent industrious young man to be her husband; and if willing to retire into a convent, she defrayed the expences required.

It was chiefly to beauty reduced to poverty, that she extended her cares; knowing the dangers and temptations to which young women who are handsome and indigent, must naturally be more exposed than any others.

In actions of this kind did this illustrious lady expend her income, at a time of life when so many others of her quality are plunged in gaieties, and dissipation; and while possessed of beauties and attractions that rendered her an object of attachment and admiration to all who had the happiness of her acquaintance.

A life and character of such exalted merit, certainly deserves to be recorded for the example and imitation of the fair sex.

She has been copied by others. I have heard of many pious ladies, who, like her, have devoted themselves

themselves to the succour of the beautiful and unfortunate among their own sex; and who by their timely generosity have contributed to the settlement in a comfortable manner, of many who possibly might otherwise have passed their lives in vice and scandal.

We may dismiss the subject by observing, that besides the convents, and other foundations for the retirement or occupation of the sex, there are also in France other ways for women to dispose of themselves more consistent with their wishes, and more advantageous for their interest.

I mean those chapters of female canonessees, where young ladies of birth and interest are admitted to enjoy an elegant maintenance upon the most agreeable footing imaginable; that of being confined no longer than they think proper, and of going or residing abroad as often as they judge it necessary for the designs they may have in view.

They are not debarred any decent pastimes that young ladies can wish for; and are at liberty to quit their abode and marry whenever they please. On changing their condition however, they forfeit their prebend; which, as it appears by this regulation, is either perpetual or temporary according to their own option.

L E T-

LETTER XIII.

On the French Devotees.

AFTER having given you an idea of the nunneries, and other female institutions of piety in France, it may perhaps prove some amusement, to bring you acquainted with a very numerous class of people here; I mean those women who profess a more than ordinary sense of religion, and a peculiar attachment to exercises of devotion.

In England, and other protestant countries, the women who addict themselves to a stricter observance of religious duties, have no other method of making it appear that they fulfill their intent, than by a more than common attention to the great rules of christianity; and the sedulous discharge of moral duties.

As there are few festivals and ceremonial demonstrations of religion in Protestantism, they have no opportunities of displaying their character in a public avowed manner, unless we except those two or three days in the week, when churches or chapels are opened for those who ex-

L

press

press more fervour for this open worship than the generality.

But in France the modes of devotion are numberless: holy-days, until very lately, returned in crowds; and enough yet remain to satisfy the appetite of those who delight in exterior acts of devotion.

Exclusive of the attendance which is due to their parish churches, a true Devotee has usually some conventual chapel in reserve, for the principal exertion of her devotional zeal.

Here she usually spends a great part of the mornings on week days, in hearing masses, and performing other pious exercises of various kinds.

From the convent itself she commonly selects her Father Confessor, and is very attentive in paying to the other members of that community, every mark of respect and civility consistent with the decorum of her sex.

In the mean time, if she is a person in good circumstances, and the convent is of a Mendicant order, it is always sure to experience her generosity.

Thus

Thus far she exhibits her disposition in public : her private life is no less remarkable for a train of devotional practices that accompany her wherever she goes.

Her dress is generally plain and decent ; but she is seldom without some costly trinkets, in the shape of beads, crosses, or sacred images, or lockets appendant to her neck or side, or from some part of her apparel.

These often contain some reliques ; such as bones of saints, shreds of garments said to have belonged to them, or other such remains. But what they most glory to wear about them, is some fragment of the cross.

Small it must be, you may well imagine, considering the multitude of fragments dispersed over all Christendom. But if no larger than a pin's point, they are always careful to deposit so precious an article in the richest inclosure they can afford.

From this description of a Devotee, you plainly see that persons of this stamp have a variety of ways to render themselves remarkable, and to attract the notice and attention of the public.

I have

I have not observed that this class of females contains much of youth and beauty. It is generally composed of women who have passed the zenith of their charms, or of such as never had any.

Notwithstanding their adherence to pious formalities, they do not deny themselves any of the comforts, or even the luxuries of life : no people fare better at their tables ; and their visitors are always certain of meeting with plenty of sweetmeats, confits, preserves, and other *bons bons*, as they call them, of every denomination.

They do not indeed appear at play-houses, or other public places of diversion ; but these excepted, they enjoy the same recreation as other people.

Much might be said on this abstraction from the gay world ; which so often takes place among the ladies of quality in France.

The first reflexion that occurs, is that possibly in most of these cases it is the world that flights them, rather than they who renounce the world.

In proof of this, we hardly ever see the young or handsome desirous of quitting the joys and amusements of society.

Neither

Neither do we find that they who have forsaken it, have in the least forgotten it. Their conversation is not less made up of the passages of the day, nor of the pleasurable occurrences in gay life, than that of the sprightly and fashionable; in short, saving some religious discourses, and occasionally some pious ejaculations, they vary but little in their social intercourse from other females of their own rank.

Among these Devotees, however, one frequently meets with women of very agreeable character, and whose deportment does real credit to their pretensions.

This is meant of such as from motives of good sense, retire, at a proper period of life, from the hurry and bustle of the croud, and chuse to enjoy the calmness and tranquillity that form the chief happiness of age, at a due distance from the busy world.

Women of this disposition may be said rather to conform to the exteriorities of unnecessary devotion, than to be seriously taken up with them. In the company of such, not only individuals of the same years as themselves, but even the young of both sexes may receive a great deal of satisfaction, if they are sensible and well inclined. The subjects which ladies of this

turn dwell upon, are very far from austere. They are often foremost in promoting the innocent freedoms of pleasurable conversation, and in entertaining their company with what shews them to be well acquainted with life.

This proves that weariness and satiety may sometimes be numbered among the various motives, that lead women who have figured in the gay and modish world, into the paths of devotion and retirement.

But in respect of the generality, may we not, without being uncharitable, suspect that the repentance exprest for past follies, is often at bottom, a deep sensibility of the decline of those allurements that once made their persons so desirable?

Let us also frankly acknowledge, that we are very apt to condemn the failings of our youthful days, from an intimate consciousness that we shall experience no more the same violence of inclination to repeat them.

The ideas of women who have lived gaily, keep them closer company than those of men in the same predicament. These have always business enough to occupy their minds completely;

pletely; or have at least much more than falls to the share of women: these cannot, in the indolence and inactivity of years, find diversity enough to efface from their remembrance those transactions, which at one time made so agreeable and so powerful an impression upon them.

Once handsome and always handsome, is the foible of women more than of men; as it is principally by their exterior charms they usually make conquests, they know not how to part with the idea that they have lost the power of charming.

This loss is to them so mortifying, that sooner than admit the notion that they have incurred it, they will labour to preserve a conviction of the contrary, by every art and stratagem that female ingenuity can devise.

Hence it happens, that even after they have in some measure forsaken the world, they cannot find in their hearts, to give over all thoughts and expectations of pleasing.

The empire of beauty is most undoubtedly the supremest of all pleasures; to retain it, therefore, what will women not do? when they perceive it on the wain, and that the time is ap-

proaching, when little or none of it will remain, still, like monarchs who, after the loss of their dominions, will not give up their titles, beauties though declined from their primitive lustre, will not resign the hope of yet possessing a competence of attractions.

In consequence of this invincible disposition of the female heart, may it not often times happen, that they are deceived in their own feelings, and imagine themselves to be lamenting the use they made of their charms, while in reality, they are only sorrowing for their loss, and for the mortifying effects of so grievous a deprivation?

There is a certain softness and suavity in the habits attending devotion among the French ladies, which retrace to the minds of devotees many of those pleasing emotions that were felt on far different occasions; and which, by conveying a lively sense of past delights, contribute in some instances to make their present system of life far from tedious and insipid.

We are not therefore to be surprized, if they should cast a retrospective eye on the days of yore, and sigh for the departure of youth and its concomitances, much oftener than deplore the transactions of that enchanting period of their existence.

Many

Many of the practical parts of their devotion are of a nature to cherish a tenderness of sentiments. Some of the saints to whom they address their prayers, were once lovely, young, and gay like themselves : they feel not therefore that reverence and awe in their intercourse with such beings, as men necessarily experience in their supplications to the great Author of all things.

Sometimes it is a beautiful young virgin in the bloom of life, whose intercession they desire for an equal share of fortitude with herself in overcoming temptations.

Sometimes it is a no less comely young man in the splendor of birth and opulence, who renounces all the advantages of such a situation ; and who perhaps tears himself from a lovely object, to dedicate his life to solitude, or to pious employments.

To him she recommends herself as a kind intercessor in behalf of her frailty, and as one through whose loving mediation she promises herself to receive much benefit.

Celestial patrons of this kind become imperceptibly an agreeable acquaintance, with whom they confer, as it were, upon all difficulties. They have recourse to them continually, and
seem

seem to look upon them in the light of friends and allies, on whose protection they have a right to depend.

Thus you see, that these Devotees have many helps and incitements in the way of life which they have embraced. It is, in fact, a comfortable shelter from the little deference, and the feigned attachment which are so commonly shewn to females who are verging to age.

We must not forget among other douceurs, that which ladies given to devotion, esteem, no doubt, a very essential one; the company of devout ecclesiastics, either in the character of ghostly directors, or of spiritual friends.

From the great reciprocal attachment which often takes place between these ladies and their holy visitants, I am inclined to imagine that much of what is termed platonic love subsists between them.

Women who have lived in the polite world, can never lose their personal accomplishments and charms so entirely, as not to possess a remnant fully sufficient to impress a man of elegant sentiments, with something more poignant than mere respect.

Feelings

Feelings of this nature are at a certain time of life, perhaps the most desirable in the judgment of reasonable persons. They hold a happy medium between the fiery impatience of youth, and the cold indifference of age. They enliven the friendships contracted between persons of different sexes; and though they do not amount to love, yet they approach very near it, and produce most of its sweets without any of its bitters.

Will you say that these French ladies, who chuse so prudent and discreet a method of enjoying the pleasures of life, are not every way commendable and worthy of imitation.

But whatever ideas may influence the connexion between those ladies and their ecclesiastical intimates, these are almost always their favourite acquaintance. They are always at home for them, and are solicitous to convince them by every mark of attention and civility, how much they are delighted with their company and conversation.

It is pleasant to behold a meeting of Devotees, when some of these spiritual confederates happen to be present. As the subjects of discourse upon these occasions are generally serious and connected with religion, curious opinions are

are often started and maintained by the ladies with no small fervour.

These holy gentlemen have on this account no trifling difficulty to contend with: on the one hand they have female warmth and impetuosity to combat; on the other the favour and predilection of these kind opponents to retain.

The dexterity with which they unite a necessary flexibility with as requisite an opposition, is truly remarkable. To give up a point without contest, would be an excess of complaisance, which would make them appear servile, and destroy the consequence annexed to their character and profession: a flat and obstinate contradiction would be no less, if not more dangerous: it might sour and indispose their female admirers; who, from being long habituated to concession and flattery in the former part of their lives, are not prepared for much resistance from any disputants.

A middle course is therefore very wisely adopted by these gentlemen: they labour with all possible address to reconcile diversity of opinions; and by the nicety with which they manage the discussions they are obliged to engage in, they can neither be said to contradict or to assent.

I have

I have been present at dissertations of this nature; and we reflected, while they were carrying on, how happy it would have been for the welfare of mankind in general, if the same yieldingness and desire to avoid altercation, which prevail in these gentle meetings, could preside in those assemblies, that are called together to settle disputed points in the theological world; but, which, almost always, end in the production of new broils and differences between the contending parties.

To sum up the whole of what may be said on the subject of the devout ladies in France, it may be asserted that they are altogether a very useful class of women.

They who give themselves up to a life of devotion from motives of sincere piety, however mistaken they may be in some of the practices and notions they adopt, yet in many others prove of great service, by the charitable spirit that animates them in a variety of instances.

There are ladies who retire from the world, vexed at the diminution of the homages they used to receive, and to find themselves out-rivalled by more youthful and successful new-comers.

These, though not to be placed on the same level with the former, are yet of utility by imitating

tating them. Their piety in this case is dictated by fashion, and their good deeds by examples, which excite their emulation without bettering perhaps their principles.

The third sort of Devotees are such as having tasted a sufficiency of the enjoyments of the gay world, and laid in a stock of polite knowledge and experience in the affairs of life, may rather be said to contract the sphere of their acquaintance, than to relinquish society.

The devotion of such ladies is equally removed from austerity, and from lukewarmness; and they steer in the midway between publicity and privacy.

Their company is usually much courted. Being with reason regarded as the properest models to copy from, they command much respect among the women, and acquire a large portion of influence and power among the men.

Happy indeed are those whom they are willing to countenance. Their recommendation seldom fails to prove a certain road to success.

LET-

LETTER XIV.

Examination of some Opinions of the French concerning their Countrywomen—their Ideas of royal Mistresses—Madam de Maintenon—Madam de Pompadour—Agnes Sorel—Influence and Power of the French Women—when first introduced to Court—Progress of Gallantry—Dispositions of Men towards Women, according to various Climates and Governments—Artifice and Cunning of the French Women—Instances of it.

IN my preceding letters I have delineated the females of this country conformably to the ideas which I conceived of them; and have done my utmost endeavours to draw no pictures that did not bear a proper resemblance.

But as in all countries the opinion of the natives themselves on a subject of so nice and intricate a nature ought to be carefully consulted, I will now, in compliance with so just a rule, inform you of some notions which the French entertain respecting their women, and examine them, at the same time, with impartiality.

Notwithstanding

Notwithstanding the devotion which Frenchmen profess for the fair sex in all countries indiscriminately, there are no people apter to complain of their power and influence. While on the one hand they patiently submit to the whim and capriciousness of woman-kind, on the other, they are everlastingly declaiming against their tyranny:

The women of their own country, however, are the principal object of their complaints.

There is hardly a failing or miscarriage in any sort of business, which the men of this country do not readily impute to the women.

As these have doubtless much to say and to do in most houses and families, there may be some truth in these imputations: but as in France, as well as elsewhere, affairs of various denominations are exclusively managed by the men, there is indubitably much more of petulance than of truth in these invectives.

But if they carry their accusations against the sex beyond the bounds of equity in some things, there are others wherein they are possibly better founded.

Though

Though the women here abstain from meddling with the business of those counting houses where the greater concerns of the mercantile world are adjusted, in that part which relates to the detail they are the busiest individuals in all France.

The management of every shop in the kingdom, seems to be a department which they have in a manner monopolized; their acuteness and industry in the business transacted there, cannot be exceeded by the men or women of any country.

The shops in Paris, and in every town in France, are absolutely under the government of the women: their husbands are so conscious of their superior dexterity, that they trust all things there implicitly to their vigilance and accuracy.

In the art of sale or purchase their talents are unbounded; their quickness in perceiving advantages, or in discovering flaws, their agreeable manner of putting off what they wish to dispose of, the sprightliness they entertain you with while bargains are going forward, these and a variety of other methods they possess of recommending themselves, render them completely qualified for the task they have undertaken.

It cannot therefore be for their interference in such matters, that their countrymen are entitled to censure them. No women in Europe, not even the Dutch, so renownedly expert in the science of shopkeeping, can surpass them in these branches.

It is in affairs of a higher class, and of far other importance, their countrymen so often find fault with them for assuming too much influence and authority.

Women, in short, if you will believe a Frenchman, are the *primum mobile* of all that is planned or executed in that kingdom, relative to its government and politics, as well as to internal concerns of inferior moment.

Their intriguing disposition renders them mistresses of every secret; they pry into every scheme of consequence, whether of a public tendency or of a private nature, whether it relates to the state, or to the church.

This versatility of temper leads them into an endless maze of business; it occupies their faculties in transactions of the most serious, as well as of the most airy complexion, and gives them an in-

interest in all affairs, that keeps their abilities perpetually on the stretch.

No Frenchman of rank is without a female favourite; the natural volatility and talkativeness of this nation is such, that the wisest of them partake of it. Now a French lady delights in exacting from her admirers a detail of what they are doing in the world; of course a man will endeavour to give her some satisfaction on this score; but let him be ever so discreet, when once engaged in topics of this sort, it will be difficult for him to preserve his discretion so inviolate, as not to drop some hint that will, in spite of himself, lead to a clue, which female cunning will either unravel itself, or prevail upon him imperceptibly to unfold.

In such wise are the mysteries of state handed about among the great. The minister cannot totally conceal them: we will suppose that his years or gravity preserve him from female snares; but then he has assistants and dependents; these necessarily participate in his knowledge; and if but one only of these communicates any part of it, the rest is, by inference and conjecture, soon explained.

Such are the grievances a Frenchman complains of; but who is to blame in all this but

himself? His blind homage to the sex renders him a willing subservient to all their demands; he knows that unless he unbosoms himself on every occasion, he runs the chance of being discarded; this no Frenchman will submit to while he is able to avert such an humiliation; he therefore sacrifices all considerations to enjoy the smiles of the lady to whom, for the time, he has thought proper to devote himself.

Cardinal Richelieu, it is said, was so justly aware of this being the character of his countrymen, that he always enjoined it to his intimates, on whose attachment and fidelity he could depend, to ingratiate themselves with those ladies who were known to be the favourites of the principal personages in the kingdom. By succeeding in their applications of this kind, many of his dependents rose to great preferments, through the utility they were of to their master, in disclosing the secret machinations of those courtiers that were averse to his measures, and sought to overturn his authority.

His successor, Cardinal Mazarine, was not wanting to himself in this important particular, and trod successfully in the footsteps of his predecessor; his genius, tutored betimes in the school of Italian subtlety, knew by his own experience of what service a woman can be in effecting

fecting discoveries, when she has once obtained an ascendancy over the man from whom they are to be expected.

The French are absolutely infatuated in their notions of the omnipotence of women. It is especially in disasters that befall the public, they are principally inclined to criminate them.

During the latter part of the reign of Louis the Fourteenth, the high credit of Madam de Maintenon with that monarch, did him more disservice with his subjects, than all the misconduct, unskilfulness, or misfortunes of his ministers or generals. Whatever they did wrong, was imputed to that lady's ill advice to the King, in counselling him to employ them.

No accusation was ever more untrue, or more inequitably founded; Louis employed the best ministers and the best generals that his kingdom afforded; unluckily for him they had to deal with more able ministers and more able generals.

But this the French either did not, or would not perceive. *Des Ministres et des Generaux a la Maintenon*, was the word at Court among the discontented, and was the cry of the ignorant multitude throughout the nation.

In later times, even our own, the same infatuation prevailed, if possible, in a more absurd degree. While our fleets and armies, during the late triumphant war, were astonishing the whole world with the greatness and perpetuity of their successes, the French were exclaiming against Madam de Pompadour, and reviling her in the most scandalous manner, for betraying her King and country to the enemy. They did not limit themselves to general assertions; they particularized her perfidy; but the instances they mentioned were so unaccountable and incredible, that no person in his senses could believe them.

It is not only among the vulgar that reports of this absurd kind are eagerly received and disseminated; they seem to have gained ground even among many of the better sort. Often have I heard our victories ascribed to the gold thrown into the lap of that celebrated lady; and the many defeats of the French at sea and land laid to her charge in the most circumstantial manner.

As a sample of the amazing credulity of the French in these matters, I recollect, that being once in the company of some French officers, and the discourse turning on the events of the last war, one of them, a gentleman of good sense in other respects, roundly asserted, that in a certain
naval

naval engagement (which I now forget) the French commander had positive and explicit orders in his pocket, procured avowedly by Madam de Pompadour, to suffer himself to be beaten and taken. What can one say to people who are determined to give faith to such absurdities ?

That lady, however, was not more unfortunate than any of her antecessors ; the mistresses of kings in France have met with very little quarter from the people of that kingdom ; these delight in depicting them with the most invidious colours, and representing them as the cause and origin of all public calamities.

Louis the Fourteenth most assuredly did infinite mischief to his realm, and his bad qualities were many : yet the French to this day, when they speak of his vices, insist more vehemently on his addiction to women, than upon any other ; they seem willing to forget his unjust wars, his depopulation of the kingdom, his oppression of the people, and the other sinister events of his reign ; but his mistresses they are not the least inclined to forgive him.

The only lady of this description, that ever escaped the odium of the French nation, was the famous Agnes Sorel, the favourite of Charles
the

the Seventh, the fortunate competitor of our Henry the Sixth for the crown of that monarchy.

In addition to her beauty, she possessed an extraordinary share of wit, and a greatness of soul that endeared her even to those who disapproved of her connexion with that prince: but what chiefly recommended her to public notice and affection was, that she did not countenance the inactivity and indolence of which he was notoriously guilty; on the contrary, she was ever exciting him to action, and urging him to signalize himself by such exploits, as should make his subjects acknowledge he was worthy of being their king.

There is a story of her, that seeing the king one day very busied in preparing things for a festival of pleasure on her account, she told him with the resolution of a heroine, that she would not absolutely partake of it, nor of any other, until he had gained in person some advantage over the enemy. She added, that it had been predicted to her, she should one day be the mistress of a great and victorious king; that day she had long looked for; it was yet to come; the king of England bid fairest to be that conquering prince who was destined for her; she wished him therefore to maintain by noble deeds
his

his title to her heart, lest she should be tempted to carry it to this more successful rival.

This animated speech produced its intended effect; it roused the king from the state of inaction in which he had hitherto remained, to the great prejudice of his affairs; he assumed immediately an active and diligent part; his attachment to Agnes, instead of soft and effeminate, became manly and heroic, and he strove thenceforward to deserve her smiles by deeds of bravery and prowess.

It was happy for Charles to have connected himself with a woman of this noble disposition: well might his subjects forgive him his passion for one that consulted his honour and the public welfare still more than her own convenience. In this instance, the mistress corrected the monarch, and taught him at the hazard of losing the power and splendor annexed to her situation, the duties which a prince in his circumstances owed in so peculiar a manner to his people.

To this celebrated lady may in some measure be ascribed the salvation of France. Charles was of so luxurious and careless a temper, that while the English arms were carrying all before them, he was amusing himself with merriments
and

and diversions, as if in a time of profound peace and security. One of his generals waiting upon him on a business of great importance, found him so taken up in planning a matter of this nature, that without attending to the subject of this officer's errand, the King spent a considerable time in explaining to him the whole process of the affair that so much employed his attention; asking him, after he had done, what he thought of it? I think, answered the General, that you cannot lose your kingdom more cheaply and gaily.

The high opinion of this famous mistress of Charles the Seventh of France, followed her to the grave, and has lasted to this day. French writers of all classes, poets and historians, laymen and ecclesiastics, speak of her with respect. She has been celebrated by the most illustrious personages in her country; even kings have taken up the pen to do honour to her memory.

She was held in singular veneration by Francis the First, the great reviver and protector of literature in France, and one of the greatest princes that ever adorned the throne of that monarchy.

Seeing her picture one day, he considered it awhile with profound attention; then turning
to

to the courtiers that accompanied him, gentlemen, said he, let me pay that tribute of praise and gratitude which, as King of France, I owe to the memory of a woman who preserved the crown on the head of my predecessors ; so saying, he wrote the following lines under the picture :

*Plus de louange et d'honneur tu merite,
La cause etant de France recouvrer,
Que ce que peut dedans un cloitre ouvrir
Close nonain ou bien devot hermite.*

“ More praise and honour thou deservest for being the cause of recovering France, than is due to the recluse virtues of nuns and friars cloistered up in solitude.”

The French indeed cannot express themselves too warmly, when they speak of one who was so eminently instrumental in retrieving France from the terrible condition, to which, during several reigns, it had been reduced, through the formidable ascendancy obtained by the councils and arms of England in that kingdom.

But such mistresses are not frequently found neither in France nor in other countries ; when such female characters appear, 'tis pity that a diadem should not always encircle their brows.

It

It is not only in royal favourites the French can trace the causes of public mischances, it is equally in those who are less exalted.

Omnia venalia Romæ, was not more true at the time it was first said, than it is at present among the ladies who sway *les puissances*, as the French stile them, the ruling people in France.

I have heard a late Minister of State in France, accused of being such a dupe and slave to his mistress, as to commit to her hands an almost unlimited power in the department relating to the *lettres de cachet*.

This woman was of a boundless avarice, and, unfortunately for numbers, had equal art and subtlety; she governed absolutely in this oppressive province, and raised an immense revenue by her manifold contrivances.

They who bore any secret ill-will to others, might, for a stipulated sum, obtain a letter of imprisonment against them; and the friends of these might, on the like terms, procure their release. Thousands of such letters and releases passed through her hands, and served to enrich her equally at the expence of the persecutors and the persecuted.

This

This infamous traffic was not discovered till it had been long carried on ; and I don't remember to have ever heard that the sufferers were any ways indemnified.

Instances of oppression and malversation, pretty much in the same strain, are laid to the charge of others of the like class.

But this only constitutes a part of the grievances the French complain of, as occasioned by their women.

The French scruple not to tell you, that the four pillars of the state rest on their shoulders. These four pillars, it seems, are, in the first place, the making of war and peace ; secondly, the disposal of all places, civil, ecclesiastical, and military ; thirdly, the distribution of rewards and of punishments ; fourthly, the reception into favour, and the dismissal from the good graces of the sovereign and his ministers.

According to this description, the credit and authority of the French women is great indeed. Neither is it altogether unfounded, if one may judge from the daily reports of what occurs at the French Court, and every where else in that country.

It

It is easy to perceive, on a very little acquaintance with the French, how much they are not only influenced, but even avowedly governed by the sex.

Married people should have only one soul in two bodies; but, without being married, both the bodies and souls of the men in France, are at the absolute devotion of the women; or, in other words, the women are the life and soul that animates the men.

The weakness of mind, the debility of woman kind in matters of importance, has long been, with, or without reason, a subject of much talk and declamation among men: but the French exceed, perhaps, all nations in expressing a slight opinion of female abilities; and yet, strange to tell, no nation seems readier to give the lie to its own asseverations.

They put one in mind on these occasions, of those bravos who speak boldly of their intended feats, while the enemy is at a distance; but who lose their resolution, and shrink with fear at his approach.

It is precisely so with most Frenchmen; while absent, their female tyrants are but little minded; and one would be apt to think that the
Salic

Salic law, which disqualifies the women from wearing the crown, disqualifies them no less from claiming the least share of power in the smallest occurrences.

But how different are the realities from appearances! You may hear a man laying out with the greatest air of determination, the projects which he has formed, or rather pretends to be forming; little would you suspect that meer imagination is all the while at work for your entertainment; yet this is certainly the case; the presence of her, on whose predilection he values himself, suspends all further progress; and, unless her assent has accompanied his intentions, he will never venture to carry them into execution.

This subjection of the men is however attended with every softening circumstance on the part of the women; they rule, 'tis true, but then it is over willing subjects, who are proud of their submission, and who glory in the obedience they pay to the desires and requests of their fair ones.

Far from betraying reluctance, the French, to do them justice, do not obey like slaves; 'tis a spirit of gallantry that animates them in this universal deference for the fair sex; their compliance

pliance is evidently dictated by the motive of pleasing those to whose will they act so subserviently.

They are even ingenious in displaying their alacrity in such cases; the anticipation of a lady's wishes, is an art which they study with much eagerness. They who succeed best are always rewarded with those flattering marks of approbation, with which the wisest men in the wisest nations are so deeply captivated, and which the French women are usually so expert in conferring in the most gracious manner.

Both the young and the old among the French, are included in this account. The first lesson a young gentleman learns, is *de savoir plaire aux dames*, to ingratiate himself with the ladies; and, we may truly add, it is the last which a Frenchman forgets.

In France it is common to see a man on whom age is advancing with rapid strides, anxiously exerting himself to maintain his favour with the ladies.

Neither years nor station seem to plead an impropriety in such pursuits; even persons of unamiable character on many accounts, will aim at the reputation of being men of gallantry.

This

This frame of mind is of long standing in the French nation. Among other memorable examples let it be recorded, that the great Turenne was a professed gallant at more than sixty; and that the severe and morose Louvois was not without his mistress; for whom, it seems, he entertained so much fondness, that he procured her a place and admission at Court, in order to gratify her vanity; and possibly, at the same time, to signalize his own credit and consequence.

Both these remarkable instances have been frequently repeated in the imitation of persons of the like elevation; there is not a Court in Europe, where the great and powerful are prone to appear in the light of humble servants and favourites of the ladies.

These, on the other hand, being no less inclined to have admirers over whom to exercise their sway, 'tis no way surprizing, that both sexes agreeing so well in their propensities, France should be abundantly replenished with high finished characters in these respects.

Much did the French of yore speak and write of the gallantry of their times; but I think the present yields not in this point to any former period.

N

It

It is not three centuries since women were first introduced to Court in France, upon that free and ordinary footing they are at this day. The first monarch who by his festive disposition and love of pleasure invited them thither, was Francis I.

Before his time, the resort of the ladies to Court was only occasional; such as a high festival on account of the marriage or birth of some royal or princely personage, or the rejoicings for some auspicious event.

Whatever the occasions were, they only recurred at long intervals; and the ladies led far more retired lives than they would be pleased with at present.

The principal occurrences that drew them from their retirements, were tilts and tournaments. Here they appeared in all the splendour of the times, and here the youths of noble families had opportunities of rendering themselves acceptable in their eyes by feats of manly prowess.

That familiar intercourse which now so much facilitates acquaintance, was then utterly unknown: it often happened, that a young nobleman or gentleman became enamoured with a
young

young lady on the bare rumour of her charms, and never enjoyed the sight of her, except at church, or until some concourse of this kind brought her forth to public sight.

Immured in castles and strong holds, the young ladies spent their time in domestic occupations, under the eye of their parents; they seldom stirred abroad for amusement, unless on a visit to some relation, or upon a hunting or hawking party, mounted on led palfreys, and surrounded by the dependents of the family.

Such was the style of living that prevailed in France, not only among the younger, but even the married ladies, with few exceptions, until the commencement of the reign of the last mentioned monarch.

The same indeed may be said of the way of living prevalent among the ladies throughout the rest of Europe. In England their appearance at Court did not become frequent until the days of Henry the Eighth, who was coeval with the above Francis.

On their first introduction to Court in this habitual manner, much outcry was raised by the moralists of the age; they complained of it as an infringement upon the former strictness of

manners, and predicted a speedy decline of purity in morals and deportment.

But notwithstanding their declamations, the ladies having got possession of this agreeable spot, were not disposed to relinquish it. The men on the other hand, were too much pleased with their company to consent to their absence.

In the mean time, as the revival of literature was taking place every where, it inspired the men with more gentle and refined methods of recommending themselves to the notice of the ladies.

Instead of breaking lances on each other's shields or armour, or un-horsing each other at jousts and tiltings, they composed songs and sonnets, and sung them to the sound of lutes, and other soft instruments.

The ladies were not backward in improving themselves in the same line: they learned to sing by more melodious rules than heretofore; they learned to play upon virginals, and other musical instruments of more elegant invention, and softer harmony than those in former practice.

But

But as a just medium, when attained, seldom remains untransgressed, the politeness and refinement which had succeeded the ancient simplicity and plainness of manners, degenerated gradually into licentiousness. The respective courts of Francis and Henry exhibited some scenes of this nature.

On the demise of this last monarch, England under the three following reigns, of his son Edward, and his daughters Mary and Elizabeth, remained within the bounds of decency in these respects.

Neither indeed were the subsequent reigns of James and Charles the First, notoriously depraved. It was not until the accession of Charles the Second, that profligacy in regard to women reared its head in a bare-faced manner, and made a considerable breach in the morals of the English nation.

But it was far otherwise in France. The licentiousness that begun in the days of Francis the First, augmented fast under his successors. Henry the Second, his son, encouraged it by his own example; and it continued to increase under his three sons and successors, Francis the Second, Charles the Ninth, and Henry the Third.

Henry the Fourth was a prince of too much freedom in his own morals to discourage it in others. Gallantry since his time has made a rapid progress in France.

His son, Lewis the Thirteenth, was in his person a pious and well-meaning prince : but his life, though exemplary, made no impression on his courtiers : his character was not sufficiently respectable to gain imitators even of the virtues he had ; and he remains a strong proof, how much it is necessary that a king should have royal and princely, as well as personal good qualities, in order to be set up as an object of reverence and imitation.

Lewis the Fourteenth was far from being a pattern of regularity. His youth was a scene of continual gallantry. Perhaps no sovereign in Europe, not even our voluptuous Charles the Second, exceeded him. His inconstancy was fixed at last upon his becoming acquainted with Madam de Maintenon, whom he made his wife.

Previous to this event, his courtiers had a very licentious example to follow in the conduct of their master. A great part of his reign was marked accordingly by freedom and unrestraint in female manners. Decency in behaviour and in externals was duly preserved ; but libertinism

ism gained ground and has lost none since his time.

His successor, Lewis the Fifteenth, was, during a long space, a complete model of conjugal attachment; but he was surrounded by courtiers who profest very different maxims; he could not resist the contagion, and gave at last into a course of life with which the world is sufficiently acquainted.

Connoisseurs in these matters, of which there are numbers in France, pretend to discover a different kind of gallantry, in each of the epochs I have mentioned. I have read some and heard still more discussions upon this subject: but all I can gather is, that in proportion as the persons noted for their gallantry, were either more or less refined in their education and sentiments, their connexions of this nature were attended by more or less of politeness and decorum.

The French in general frankly allow the present æra to be the most irregular and licentious of any; they even seem to think it is accompanied with a degree of coarseness of which they acquit their forefathers: these, in their deviations from strict virtue, did not forget an appearance of decency; but their descendants have thrown aside both appearance and reality.

Such is the verdict of the French themselves on the present generation.

If the men are more wanting than formerly to exterior restraints, the women must of course be proportionally deficient in delicacy of manners.

This we need not consult the French about. The least observation will teach us, that the French women are guilty of liberties in these matters, which, were they to extend no farther, are highly offensive to persons who look for purity even in the semblance of things, and who think, not without good reasons, that to break down these exterior fences of virtue, is the first step to the downfall of virtue itself.

Female empire in France is like the government of the country where it exists. While attachments last, nothing can be more absolute on the part of the woman, nothing more submissive on that of the man.

But as connexions of this sort are usually short-lived, the various ways of exercising dominion, become by their novelty almost a matter of amusement to those who undergo it.

Subjection however of some kind or other seems necessary for a Frenchman. Whether in
love

love or in politics, he is always ready to bend the knee before some favourite idol.

The French reproach the English for being as unmanageable in matters of love as in those of state. The truth is, when an Englishman fixes his attachment upon a woman, notwithstanding he is far from deficient in fervour, yet he is not so entirely devoted to his passion, as to be blinded by it into absurdities destructive to his peace or character. He loves like a man without fawning like a child. Such is, generally speaking, the character of an English lover.

Another difference very material to the sex is, that a woman can place more reliance on the attachment of an Englishman. Though not so rich in protestations, he remains more firm and solid in substantial and lasting affection; and is not easily moved to abandon his choice.

He is not indeed so submissive to the capricious humour of his mistress as a Frenchman. He complies with her desires in a generous, but not a slavish manner; and though willing to go great lengths to please her, is not implicitly governed by all her dictates.

Such Frenchmen as delight to refine upon all subjects, attribute these differences in the respective behaviour of the English and the French
to

to woman kind, entirely to the disparity of government in those two nations.

How far such a speculation may be founded cannot, I imagine, be very clearly ascertained. The temper of mankind is undoubtedly affected by the genius of the government they live under: but though absolute power is sufficiently felt in France, it is equally known in other parts, and in some carried to a far greater excess: yet we find in most of them, the men far less subjected to the women; if we may not indeed justly accuse the men of being much too domineering.

The truth may be, that climate and natural constitution more efficaciously contribute to the formation of men's characters in these instances, than almost any other considerations.

Variety of governments have successively prevailed in the same countries, without materially affecting the general disposition of the inhabitants in their connexions with woman kind.

The principal influence exerted by disparity of government is in the conjugal state. It is from various causes found to be less liable to contamination in republics than in monarchies.

One

One of the most obvious appears to be, that in courts and capitals, the luxurious residence of princes and courtiers, their examples are perpetually stimulating others to imitate them; the consequence is, that as they usually spend much of their lives in irregularity and dissipation, they corrupt the inferior classes, always too ready to tread in the footsteps of their superiors.

But in republics, whatever the opulence of individuals may be, still as their power is confined, and their persons no otherwise respected, than their lives and character can render them, vicious and immoral habits cannot meet with patrons of sufficient magnitude, to screen their deformity: As all people are in some measure on a level, vice is not winked at on account of personal elevation, and they who lead a dissolute life, are liable to the severest censure and reprimand from their fellow-citizens.

Thus more private virtue is found in general to subsist in the intercourse between the sexes in republican governments than in monarchical.

Still, however, the degree of warmth in their reciprocal attachments, may be deduced from the nature of the climate which they inhabit.

This

This is sufficiently perceptible in most countries, notwithstanding the revolutions they may have experienced, and however the character of the people may have been altered in matters unconnected with this object.

In the northern kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark, the women are to this day regarded with the same eye as many centuries ago. The attachment of the men, though constant and lasting, is cool and placid; and their love borders near on simple friendship.

In Russia, saving the extirpation of some customs that were the result of ignorance and barbarism, the natives still retain a sort of despotism over the fair sex. It is true they are less rugged and ferocious than formerly: but it is only at court, and in some choice circles that women are treated with that politeness and deference which are due to their sex.

In Poland and in Germany, views of power and interest are as cogent as in preceding times; and devotion to the fair not much influenced by passion or sentimental preference of persons. The gallantry of those countries is rather an imitation of what has been imported from abroad, by those among them who have visited foreign parts,

parts, than the genuine growth of their own inclinations.

In Flanders, and in Holland, the latter especially, there is a regularity in their modes of love and wooing that is in a manner traditional. Violence of attachment is hardly known, but in the translations of those many romances that are fabricated in the more southern nations. Of gallantry some specimens exist; but they are of a sedate complexion; and of the parties concerned the females are very frequently the natives of other countries.

The Dutch women are in truth rather friendly and sociable than animated and attracting. They amuse one without invading one's repose. The better sort are extremely civil and well-bred, and are endowed with an easy unaffected affability that is very agreeable to strangers.

The Spanish and Portuguese women still maintain their old character of being addicted to very warm passions. There is no difference between the past and the present periods relative to this particular in either of these nations. Their poets and novel writers described them formerly as we still find them at this day.

In Italy the empire of love has lost nothing of that strength with which we see it depicted by
writers

writers who flourished of yore. Women indeed are less confined, as well as in Spain and Portugal, than they used to be; but the same temper and inclinations remain in full force; and in these both the men and the women throughout these countries strictly resemble their ancestors.

In the Asiatic parts of the world, as well as in the European provinces belonging to the Turkish empire, the like taste and notions prevail between the two sexes as in ancient times.

Without going therefore more extensively into a disquisition of this kind, it seems clear that the dispositions of men and women reciprocally differ but in few instances, in any country at present, from what they were in the remotest æras we are acquainted with.

From thence we are authorised to conclude, that climate, independently of political constitution, has the principal hand in the forming and modelling human nature, in relation to the feelings, sentiments, and behaviour of the men towards the women.

The French women are uncommonly alert in exhibiting their brightest side. Whatever accomplishments they are mistresses of are displayed in a very winning and gracious manner. They

They are possessed in the supremest degree of the most useful of all talents, that of making the utmost of those they have received from nature or have acquired through practice.

They also possess another talent not inferior to the former, that of timing them properly, and employing them generally without parade or affectation.

But their countrymen, while they give them credit for all this, complain bitterly of the use they make of these pleasing qualifications.

They accuse them of harbouring perpetual designs upon the men, of an unvarying intention to seduce indiscriminately all who approach them, and to make as many conquests as their enticing arts can procure.

In these pursuits they are represented as quite orderly and systematical. According as their plan is laid, they form themselves by previous care and preparation to undertake it with success.

As their enterprising disposition leads them into a variety of attempts, they are particularly cautious in prefacing the business they have in view, by exercising themselves in those qualifications,

cations, which they know to be most acceptable to those on whom the success of the business will depend.

Pursuant to this maxim, I heard not long since that a lady of high rank, intending to solicit a bishop for a benefice in favour of her nephew, took the pains to read over very diligently the writings of the Molinists against the Jansenists. The good bishop, it seems, was a warm foe to these last, and always expressed particular satisfaction in hearing arguments against them.

The lady was both handsome and witty, had a large share of education, and was a remarkably fluent speaker; having studied as much as appeared necessary for her purpose, she threw herself in the way of this prelate as often as she could, taking especial care to bring on imperceptibly those topics of controversy, in which she knew he so much delighted.

She displayed accordingly so much rancour against Jansenism, and spoke with so much fervour on the opposite side of the question, she argued with so much knowledge, and shewed herself mistress of so much learning on the points debated, that the prelate was equally astonished and charmed with her.

In

In the course of a few conversations she made an absolute conquest of his interest and power in ecclesiastical matters, which were very considerable; she not only procured the benefice she had proposed for her nephew, but was enabled to provide for several others of her family and connexions in the same line.

The famous Marshal Saxe, every one knows, was all his life a professed admirer of the fair. A lady of great wit, but rather indifferent circumstances, had an only son, a comely and promising youth, whom she was very desirous of introducing to the Marshal's acquaintance and favour. She had a talent for drawing, and upon this she determined to erect the edifice of her son's prosperity.

The Marshal had a seat in the country not far from the lady's house. In his excursions he often passed before it: on this circumstance she formed a project worthy of the brightest female invention.

One of her maids was courted by a young fellow in the neighbourhood. As in France it is customary in genteel families, to behave with hospitality on such occasions, she gave the young couple a wedding dinner, and invited all their friends, providing at the same time a convenient

O

dancing

dancing place in the court yard before her house, for all the young folks in the parish who chose to partake of the diversion.

She perfectly knew the Marshal to be fond of such fights, and that his curiosity would naturally prompt him to look in upon this company of rustic damsels, in the course of his afternoon's walk.

In this she was not mistaken: the Marshal on his return homewards, hearing the sound of music and dancing, stopped at her gate, and stood awhile amusing himself with the sight of the dancers.

This was the auspicious minute the lady had long wished for; she hastened to the gate, and in a most engaging manner entreated the Marshal to honour her house with his presence.

He politely accepted the offer, and was ushered into a neat and elegant hall, where the first object that struck him was the picture of himself at the upper end, in a most rich and magnificent frame.

The lady told him, that picture was the piece of furniture she most valued in her whole house for two reasons: the first, because it represented him,

him, the second, because she had drawn it herself from the frequent inspection of his person in his walks about her neighbourhood; adding, it was impossible to see such a man and ever to forget him.

The Marshal, you may well imagine, could not help being sensibly touched with these marks of esteem and respect. As he was a very polite and court-like man, he answered her civilities in the most flattering manner she could wish, and was further prevailed upon to partake of a collation she had previously prepared, in secret hope and expectation of this illustrious guest.

In the mean time, she begged the liberty of presenting her son to the Marshal, assuring him that her felicity would be complete, if he would permit the youth to accompany him in the field of glory, whenever the propitious genius of France should summon him to a renewal of his triumphs.

The words and behaviour of the lady were not lost upon this occasion; the Marshal not only repaid her attentive and respectful treatment of him with every civility she could expect, but what was more essential, as it was the chief end she proposed, he took her son into fa-

your, and provided for him in that line she so earnestly desired.

If the French ladies are conspicuously dextrous in compassing the point they propose, they are no less keen at counteracting plots and machinations, and turning them to the prejudice of their contrivers. Take the following instance.

A French gentleman's finances had been excellently deranged by the length and expences of a law-suit, which he had inherited together with the family estate; he had lost his cause and was overwhelmed with debts.

In order to repair the breaches made in his fortune, he was advised to pay his addressee to a young widow of inferior rank, but considerable wealth. His pride hesitated awhile; but necessity, the most powerful of all arguments, obliged him to throw aside all considerations of birth and denomination, and to apply himself seriously to obtain her.

She was, though not handsome in her person, of a sprightly disposition, and engaging manners, and every way fit to make a reasonable man completely happy.

Her

Her husband had been a fortunate merchant. He had known her when a child, and his affection became in process of time so great, that having lost his former wife, and having no child nor near relation to provide for, he married her in the decline of life, and after living with her a few years, he died and left her very opulent.

Such was the lady whom our gentleman thought proper to single out as his future partner. As he was very nobly descended, he found no difficulty in procuring admittance to her company, and being of the same province and city, and no ways disagreeable in his person, she expressed no repugnance to receive him on the footing of a lover.

But pride was not the only failing of this gentleman; he had another still more odious and despicable; he was avaricious to an extreme degree, he coveted the possession of every thing that he saw, and was ruled by no other principle than that of the most sordid interest.

This mean disposition was so predominant in all his conduct, that it was visible to all that had the least knowledge of him; instances of it occurred daily; it rendered him contemptible to people of his own rank, and disgusting to those of an inferior.

These two vices of pride and avarice disputed in a manner, which of the two should have the upper hand in the composition of his character : as they were perpetually at variance with each other, they contributed to put him in an ill humour with himself, through the violent conflict they maintained in his mind ; and from being displeasing to himself, he soon became equally disagreeable to others.

The view of coming into the possession of affluence, enabled him during some time to dissemble his real disposition, and to affect good-nature and liberality. But as affectation is a mask that does not conceal every feature, he could not disguise himself so thoroughly, as not to betray his character occasionally.

The young widow, whose temper was all mildness and complacency, was alarmed at the discovery of a frame of mind calculated for the very reverse of happiness : her penetration was too keen not to perceive that his aim was solely to obtain her fortune ; and the manifestation of his pride on sundry occasions, was attended by too many proofs of its excess and incorrigibility, to leave her in any doubt of the danger she ran of being undone by marrying such a man.

Still

Still however female vanity would not allow her to dismiss him ; he had a title, and the prospect of wearing it softened the hardships of which she foresaw she must consent to bear the load.

Among her female visitors was another widow, young and rich like herself, and the relict also of a merchant, the intimate friend of her deceased husband to whom he was related.

This lady was far the wealthiest of the two, and had the advantage of being younger and very beautiful ; she was absent when our gentleman first became acquainted with his widow, otherwise he would not have hesitated a moment in his choice of the latter.

As he had however no particular predilection for the former, he made no scruple to abandon his designs upon her, in order to attach himself to the latter.

But lest, in his pursuit of this new object, he should miss the other, he still feigned to carry on his courtship, and did not apparently remit of his assiduities with his prior acquaintance.

As he was made up of vanity, as well as pride and avarice, he could not help fancying that his person, which was not unseemly, was exquisitely

prepossessing : this filled him with the most intolerable presumption, and, added to the notions of his birth, so troublesomely prevalent in France, rendered him very unacceptable to the persons who knew him.

It was upon the strength of these considerations, that he formed the resolution to relinquish the first widow, and pay his addresses to the second.

But the first of these ladies was beginning to lose patience at the many airs of importance he was perpetually assuming. His pride would often supersede his discretion : in the impetuosity of discourse, he was used to spare no profession that was incompatible with those ideas of noblesse that so generally infatuate his countrymen ; among others, he would occasionally undervalue that of merchants, and of all people appertaining to that class.

This naturally offended the lady, who, notwithstanding the disparity of years, had borne a very sincere attachment to her late husband and benefactor, and could not brook an insult upon the occupation he followed, which indeed was an indirect one upon herself,

She

She ventured one day to tell the gentleman, that she took his treatment of her late husband's profession as injurious to herself, and that if he valued her, as he pretended, he would, for her sake, respect the memory of a man who had enabled her to command his attention.

The gentleman fully understood her meaning; but as his scheme with the other widow was not arrived at maturity, he parried the blow with his usual dissimulation, predetermined to bear her reprimands, and even to marry her, if he failed in the other point.

But his new flame, if such a man could feel any, though good tempered and sprightly, had not so much of the passive mildness of the other. She had never thought favourably of him; but upon disclosing his intentions towards her, she conceived a still greater aversion for him, and resolved at once not only to discourage his addresses, but even to expose him, as a man lost to all sentiments of honour, and guilty of the meanest duplicity.

Full of this determination, she opened the business to her friend, the forsaken widow, who had herself, for some time past, imagined she perceived a diminution of his warmth, and had even imparted her suspicions to this very lady, that

that he had altered his mind upon this matter, and was possibly engaged in some other pursuit.

The discovery of his perfidy roused her indignation much more than it affected her feelings. The loss of such a lover was certainly a gain to a woman of her sensibility; her vanity was chiefly hurt upon this occasion, and the foible of her countrywomen, as well as her countrymen, still operated in some measure, in representing to her the loss of that rank and dignity, to which, it seems, she would willingly have sacrificed the peace of her life.

Her friend knew her weakness in this respect, and had frequently taken the liberty of remonstrating what a price she must pay by indulging it; she had constantly opposed the match with this gentleman, and had done it sometimes so warmly, that had not her friend known her disposition thoroughly, and been convinced that she was not interested in her advices, she would have incurred the suspicion, that she wished he might meet with a refusal in order to secure him for herself.

But this was the last thing in this lady's thoughts: she detested him on account of his own bad qualities, and no less for presuming to address her, when he knew that she was in a manner pre-engaged with a young gentleman of very reputable

reputable parents, with whom she had been intimate from the infancy of both, and who having gone abroad before she was married, had returned since her widowhood, and renewed his former connexion.

The assurance of the other in obtruding himself, as it were, upon her inclinations, had highly exasperated her: but the ideas of his rank made him blind to all other considerations; he thought it was sufficient to induce any woman to give him the preference over one less nobly born.

After the first emotions of anger and resentment were subsided, the forsaken lady asked her friend in what manner she should proceed with a wretch that made her the subject of a mere farce, and was daily contriving how to deceive her.

The warmth of friendship each of these ladies entertained for the other, excited them at first to a resolution of treating him with all the ignominy which he deserved, and of laying him out in such colours as should make him universally detested.

But when they had dwelled some time upon this idea, which was natural enough in this case, the youngest, who possessed a quicker vein of humour

humour and vivacity than the other, bethought herself, that to make him the butt of public laughter and ridicule, would prove a more substantial revenge, as well as one that he particularly merited for his arrogance and baseness.

A young milliner of their acquaintance was at that time in mourning for a near relation lately deceased in the West-Indies: it had been reported that he died immensely rich, and had left all he had to this young woman's mother, who was his cousin, and whom in the days of his youth he had courted and would have married, had not the narrowness of his circumstances prevented him.

In order to remedy this defect, he went to one of the French islands in America, where by his industry he accumulated in the course of years a very capital fortune. Such was the report that was circulated concerning this young woman's deceased relation.

She was an agreeable, lively girl, very shewy, and full of the smartness peculiar to her profession; she possessed a good share of understanding and acuteness, and was of a disposition not averse to engage in any enterprize, from whence advantages could be reaped.

On

On receiving the news of this relation's demise, her mother, who was her only surviving parent, embarked on board a vessel that was bound for the place of this late relation's residence, leaving her daughter to the care of her friends, who had on this occasion supplied her liberally with the means of making a comfortable voyage, and of inspecting into the affairs of the deceased.

This young woman, by the sprightliness of her manner and conversation, had greatly recommended herself to the notice of the youngest of our two widows. This lady observing her one day rather more grave and pensive than usual, enquired the cause in a very friendly manner, assuring her that she had conceived an attachment for her, of which she was ready to testify the truth whenever it became necessary.

The young woman, encouraged by her kind expressions, disclosed the causes of her appearing so thoughtful. She told the lady that she had just received a letter from her mother, acquainting her, that the immense fortune they had been taught to expect, was reduced to much less than she could ever have imagined.

The young lady comforted her in the most friendly terms, bade her not be discouraged, and
that

that she would exert herself in her behalf, and endeavour to alleviate her affliction by every means in her power.

But the young woman, after thanking her for the obliging part she took in her misfortune, told her, that exclusive of the loss of the fortune she expected, she had met with a disappointment not less mortifying; that a gentleman of high extraction and large estate, had lately been very assiduous in his visits at a house where she often visited, and had in a private interview made her a declaration of love upon honourable terms; that she had not seen him since this unwelcome news was arrived, and was unspeakably aggrieved to think, that she must at once resign all thoughts of opulence and quality, and sink to her primitive mediocrity.

The lady sympathized with her very sincerely for this accumulation of sorrow, and proceeded with an innocent curiosity to enquire who this gentleman was, with whom she had hoped to be connected in so splendid a manner.

The young woman, in compliance with her request, satisfied her very faithfully in every particular. It appeared, on the winding up of her story, that her lover was the very identical gentleman who had already professed the same
passion

passion for the two widows. On the report of the prodigious inheritance that would become the property of this young woman, he had thought proper to make her the object of his attention.

On the disclosing of this matter, the lady could not contain herself; she burst out into such a fit of laughter, that the young woman imagined the lady thought her a simpleton, for believing the gentleman could have been in earnest; she therefore assured her, in the most serious manner, that she was convinced he had not intended to impose upon her; that she had been applied to on his account by some ladies of quality, who had represented him as a man of great possessions, and still greater expectations, and had persuaded her that she could not have met with a nobler opportunity of improving the advantages that fortune had thrown into her hands.

Upon hearing all this the lady expressed more surprize than before; she now saw in the fullest light the real character and disposition of the man who was the hero of this curious tale. She took the young woman by the hand, wished her joy of her acquisition, telling her to be ruled by her and another friend, to whom she

would

would introduce her, and she should still become a lady of quality, if not a lady of fortune.

She bade her conceal the news of her disappointment, and leave the management of her affairs with her and the other friend, promising they would both warmly concur in forwarding her wishes, if she was desirous of wearing a title.

The young woman, who had more ambition than covetousness, readily agreed to run all risks for the obtaining of that end, charmed to find that fortune would in any shape indemnify her for having deceived her other expectations.

The two widows having consulted together and formed their plan, sent for the young woman, and gave her a considerable sum of money, desiring her to lay it out on her person and apparel, and to spare no cost in equipping herself with the utmost elegance and splendor.

She obeyed their injunctions with the most ready punctuality; the assistance she had already received from her friends had enabled her to make a very decent and genteel figure among her acquaintance; but this new supply was far beyond her former receipts, she now appeared abroad

abroad with more lustre than ever ; and was talked of as one lately come to the possession of great riches.

In the mean time the gentleman, who thought he had made compleat dupes of the two widows, continued his courtship to the young woman with more eagerness than ever : entertaining no doubt from all that he saw and heard, that she was entitled to the splendid inheritance that was so much spoken of, he determined to withdraw himself from the other two ladies gradually, and without coming to an open and sudden rupture.

These on the other hand, who, for obvious reasons, were wishing to precipitate matters, expressed no displeasure on the discontinuance of his former assiduities ; and left him at full liberty to carry on the intrigue with his new mistress.

They contributed all they could to countenance the rumours that obtained of her vast wealth ; they frequently invited her to their respective houses, and treated her with all the respect that was due to her appearance ; in short, they neglected nothing to impress the public with a persuasion that she was become a very opulent heiress.

Mean while the gentleman's circumstances obliged him to bethink himself seriously of settling, if possible, with some woman who could retrieve them, having given up the two widows and fixed his mind upon this young woman, he ventured one day to tell her, that the necessity of being present upon one of his estates, in consequence of some pecuniary transaction, would oblige him to absent himself for a short time, unless she could make it convenient to her, to spare him a sum of money which he specified.

She answered that she would take his request into consideration; and would certainly, if it consisted with other arrangements, accommodate him with the sum he had mentioned.

Having acquainted her two friends with what had happened, they supplied her with what was wanted, and instructed her how to act on any future demands of this nature, which they apprehended, from their knowledge of his circumstances, could not fail of being soon repeated.

On the receipt of the money, the gentleman got rid of the necessity of repairing to his imaginary estate, and was enabled to remain within the

the daily approach of his mistress, whom he now attended more closely than ever.

The two forsaken ladies had justly foreboded another application to her of the same kind. His embarrassments were now beginning to multiply : he had, it seems tired his friends with reiterated importunities ; with which, after complying upon many occasions, they had at last declared they would be no farther troubled.

This had obliged him to have recourse to his mistress ; and he found himself again compelled to have recourse to her generosity.

She again assisted him as she had done before ; but informed him at the same time, that though it was always in her inclination, it would not be in her power to continue on the same footing of expences on his behalf : that she was accountable to her mother for all that she expended ; and might expose herself to a very severe reprimand, by sharing what she had in her hands with a person who had no legal right to claim any thing from her. That possibly by such a conduct she might fall under the suspicion of being connected with him in a manner injurious to her character ; and might do herself a detriment, of which, she was very sensible, he had too much

honour, to be even the innocent and unintentional cause.

The gentleman felt the propriety of her words, and had nothing to reply to the arguments which she alledged for her refusal of any future aid.

But as she had dropped a palpable hint, that she had no objection to render his demands lawful, he began to consider whether the mother's absence would prove an obstacle to the daughter's giving him her hand.

As she had always behaved with every mark of predilection for him, he flattered himself that he should not be refused, were he to press her to grant him that favour, without waiting for the return of her mother from the West-Indies.

His birth, his title, would, he doubted not, be a sufficient excuse for the daughter's not consulting her mother; and would quickly facilitate a reconciliation in a country, where the honour conferred upon such an occasion, would avowedly flow entirely from his side.

He had no sort of suspicion of the goodness of her circumstances. The consciousness of the disorder his affairs were in, or to speak more

more truly, the knowledge that they would not bear inspection, prevented him from insisting upon a scrutiny into her's; lest she might be prompted to return him the compliment, by desiring to be made acquainted with his own; which was a business for which he was not at all prepared.

After having much pondered on the matter, he resolved at last to put the question to her. It was high time he should meet with some relief; he saw no quarter whence it could come but from that of an advantageous marriage.

She received his application with all the readiness and pleasure he could wish, and they became man and wife accordingly.

The indissoluble knot once tied, and our young milliner become a baroness, it now remained to put an end to the comedy, by concluding the plot in such wise, as to protect her from the consequences of the discovery that must soon ensue, and screen her from the resentment of the Baron.

It was not long before it was judged expedient to unravel this mystery; I mean that part of it which related to the Baron's pecuniary expectations.

He found himself a few days after his wedding, which from motives of parsimony he had solemnized in a very clandestine manner, assaulted by demands of various kinds.

His intentions were to delay the payment of every debt he had contracted, as long as he could contrive to put off his creditors by those various means which the French noblesse have the privilege of exerting.

But some friends, who thought him greatly benefited by this marriage, representing to him the indignity of such a conduct, and urging him to do justice to those who had so long expected it, he was necessitated to alter his intentions.

As he had concealed his real situation from his bride, he had not hitherto exacted from her any specification of the effects of which he imagined she was possesst; but upon this occasion he was fain to be explicit, and to let her know that he stood in need of considerable assistance, for the settlement of some affairs that were very pressing.

The young Baroness, who had been previously taught her lesson, answered that for the present she had no more than was absolutely requisite for the support of herself. This she would chearfully share with him : that she was in hourly

ly expectation of hearing from her mother, and receiving some remittances; but that she was extremely astonished, that enjoying so great an income as he had told her, he should be distressed in the manner he represented.

This was at hunderbolt to the Baron; he stood amazed and incapable of replying, but as he still believed that she would come to the possession of much affluence, he comforted himself with the distant prospect, and endeavoured to arm himself with patience.

In the mean time, the two widows whom he had forsaken, triumphed in the consciousness of the snare in which they had entangled him: he was now caught in a trap from which it was impossible for him to extricate himself; and they enjoyed the satisfaction of having punished him for his avarice, perfidiousness, and pride, in a manner that perfectly suited all three.

In a short time after he had been married, his lady's mother returned from the American islands, with a very moderate sum of money, in comparison to what she had promised herself.

The Baron, who dreamed of nothing but treasures, became almost frantic with rage when he
was

was told the amount of the legacy she had brought with her. His avarice and haughtiness were equally mortified; and he was now thoroughly satisfied how pitifully, as well as how absurdly he had acted, in not adhering to the first choice he had made.

The two widows on the other hand, did not fail to depict him in the most despicable light, that words accompanied with truth could throw upon him: they covered him with so much opprobrium and shame, that he was compelled to withdraw from the scene of his ignominy: he quitted the city where these transactions had taken place, and retired with his wife and mother-in-law to a country residence in the neighbourhood. Happy that in his well-merited punishment, he had still met with a woman, who though she had deceived him, had not involved him with herself in absolute perdition. She had only brought him to a condition that did not exclude the decent comforts of life, though it did not admit of those appurtenances which ambition sighs for, nor supply him with that profusion of property which his avarice required, but which the meanness of his disposition would have rendered useless to any other purpose, than that of making him contemptible.

Three

Three or four years after this event, on the breaking out of the last war between France and England, being an officer of marines, he was ordered on board a man of war, and was shortly after slain in an engagement.

His wife behaved to him in a most irreproachable manner: happily for her he never knew the part she had borne in inveigling him to marry her. He thought she had been disappointed as well as himself; and from that motive, made a virtue of the necessity of forgiving her, for having frustrated his covetous and haughty schemes in so decisive and compleat a manner.

The whole of the intrigue never came out till after his demise; when the two ladies, whom he had endeavoured to impose upon, thought themselves at liberty to divulge it, as no ill consequences could then result to her on whose account they had kept it concealed.

L E T.

LETTER XV.

Dexterity of the French Women in obtaining an ascendancy over the Men—their Interference in judicial Matters—Story of a Lawyer—Talents of the French Ladies in political Intrigues—Louisa, Mary, Queens of Poland—Notions of the French on the Beauty of their Women—Finesses of the French Women in their Intercourse with Men—accused of Dissimulation and Ambition—Strictures on Female Lust of Dominion—Excessive Freedom of Behaviour and Manners in the French Women—Reflexions on the frequent Tours to France by the fashionable People of England.

HAVING, I hope, afforded you some amusement in the three stories that concluded my last, I now resume the subject that lead me to them; the cunning and dexterity of the French women.

The ingenuity of the two first ladies was not only justifiable, but did honour to the abilities which they displayed on the occasion.

That of the two last will, in the apprehension of rigourists, appear to have been too much dictated

tated by resentment and revenge. But it may be answered, that they fought their antagonist with his own weapons, and only made use of retaliation.

In addition to this acuteness they are wonderfully expert in making the readiest use of the talents and attainments of which they are mistresses. They perfectly understand how to improve their personal charms and conceal their imperfections; and they are the most skilful adepts possible in the art of insinuating themselves into the favour of men and of gaining an ascendancy over them.

When a French woman has formed a design upon a man, it is incredible with what art and industry she will labour to get possession of him. To preclude his discovery or suspicion of her intent, she makes her approaches with all the circumspection of those who are laying siege to a town; she begins by informing herself of his friends, connexions, well-wishers, and dependents. To these she studiously displays herself in every light that can make her appear amiable. She loses no occasion of speaking with praise and respect of the person she has in view, and of preparing him by this previous homage to think favourably of her.

This

This undoubtedly is the method which all people of sagacity and knowledge of the world, will pursue in order to ingratiate themselves with those whom they wish to make their friends. The good or bad that is spoken of us, seldom, or never, fails of coming to our ears through some channel often the least suspected. They who are diligent in letting no opportunities pass of saying advantageous things of others in their absence, have usually found it to answer their purpose in the very material end of securing them a favourable reception, or of softening any prejudice conceived or insinuated against them.

The French women are described not only by their countrymen, but by others, as excelling in this beneficial science.

If their ingenuity is on the stretch in paving the way for their future operations, it is not less alert, when the season is arrived for entering upon them.

When they imagine that a sufficient impression has been made by this indirect application, they know admirably how to seize the critical minute of introducing personally their wishes and pretensions to those, whose minds they have reason to think are inclined to harbour ideas of friendliness and benevolence in their behalf.

Thus

Thus arrayed with a proper degree of confidence, a French woman assails a man, half prepared as it were, to make those concessions she desires.

The natural gallantry of the French renders them very susceptible of those feelings that give women such an irresistible ascendancy over men. In no country is this ascendancy so often attempted, and so often made serviceable. The men know it, and the women too. Whenever solicitations are necessary, women are constantly employed: they not only solicit for themselves, and for their own particular affairs, but for their relations, and friends, and all their concerns. The men are too wise to take this deparment out of their hands. The husband deposes his wife, the brother his sister, the son his mother, the nephew his aunt. This deputation in short extends as far as it will possibly go. No man is so unwise as to take this business upon himself, while he is able to procure a female mediator.

In consequence of this amazing influence of the women over the men, it is common throughout France in judicial proceedings, to have recourse to the fair, in order to mitigate the severity of strict justice; and one may add without derogating from truth, in order, if possible, to
incline

incline the scale on the wrong side, and to warp and bias the judgment of those in whose breast the decision lies.

Numerous are the anecdotes of weighty matters being too frequently settled much more by favour than equity. The French indeed heavily complain of the many acts of injustice resulting from this interposition of the fair. But it is a custom of long standing; and as those who are prejudiced by it in one instance, may be benefited in another, there seems to be an universal consent for every one to take his chance.

What powerfully contributes to the establishment and duration of this custom, is that the persons who are to decide in all suits, are known to the public, as they enjoy that prerogative officially, and not accidentally, as in the case of English juries.

Numbers of them are young gentlemen in the flower of youth. An address to such by a beautiful woman cannot entirely be lost, even supposing that they have firmness enough to withstand the general intent of her supplications.

This, let me assure you, is supposing full enough. Figure to yourself a young man in the full season of his passions, accosted by a lovely,

lovely young female in the most humble and supplicating strain, pouring her soul before him in tears and intreaties, and practising upon him all those arts with which nature has armed the sex, in order to compensate for the dominion which superior force has given to men. Imagine her appealing to his feelings by all those motives that are so prevalent in the mouth of a handsome woman. Add to this that all this business is transacted in an interview between the two parties only, the supplicator and the supplicated. No eye is present to witness any indications of human weakness; no ear to catch, nor lips to divulge any loose or unguarded expressions; all is secret, all is hidden from the censorious world; whatever suspicions may arise, whatever sentence issue from the bench, nothing can be alledged, nothing can be proved against them who pronounce it.

When all this has been attentively considered, will any man presume to say, that it is possible for the most unfeeling, the most obdurate and austere, to divest themselves of all manner of partiality, and to weigh the business before them, without the least reference to the lovely intercessor that has just left them, and whose affecting emotions they could not help participating, unless we are to suppose them something more or less than man.

The

The ancient sages of the law, conscious, no doubt from their own experience, of the dangers resulting from the permission of this intercourse between judges and supplicants, have occasionally proposed an abolition of the practice. But their endeavours, it seems, were but feeble; as it still subsists, to the great interruption of the due administration of justice; to say nothing of the scandalous adventures to which it now and then gives birth.

France abounds with stories relating to the dispensators of the law, and their female clients and solicitors. I was lately entertained with one which may perhaps afford you some pastime.

A farmer-general who had acquired immense riches, as most of them usually do, had a son whom he was very desirous to bring up for the same business.

The young man, who had, during his residence at college, formed fundry connexions with other young men of opulent families, as soon as he was introduced into the world, launched into a variety of expence and extravagance, quite inconsistent with the plodding and circumspect profession, for which his father intended him.

Finding

Finding him incorrigible, and yet wishing to reclaim him, the father was advised to purchase for him the place of a counsellor in parliament, as the French stile it; that is to say, a seat on the bench in one of their courts of judicature.

In this he did no more than many opulent fathers do every day for their children in France, where the purchase of such places is as usual as of any post or employment whatever.

His son, though wild and dissipated, neither wanted sense nor learning; it was not indeed of that sort which would have qualified him for the post he held; but it was liberal, and precisely of that nature which enables young men to shine in gay and fashionable companies.

Among other qualities, he had a peculiar turn for the laughable and ludicrous; and never missed an opportunity of exercising it whenever it offered.

This of course made him very acceptable to those of the same cast; who form a large party among the young gentlemen in France.

As he added to this a humane and compassionate disposition, he was quickly noted by those who relied more upon that, than upon the goodness

of the causes that brought them before the tribunal of which he was a member.

Being handsome as well as tender-hearted, and extremely devoted to the fair-sex, no young gentleman of the long robe had more frequent visits from the ladies, in the way of his profession.

His partiality to any cause that had a fair pleader to enforce it, was conspicuous to all his brethren; and he was emphatically stiled the patron and advocate of beauty.

Among the many female solicitors that attended his levees, there came one on whom the hands of the graces had lavished all they could bestow, in such profusion, that she struck him at once with that admiration and wonder which so completely captivate and enslave the hearts of amorous young men.

I need not say that her requests were so many commands which it was impossible for him to disobey, and her looks so many darts which pierced him to the very soul.

He espoused her cause with so much warmth, that in a short time she came triumphantly out of her suit, which was a very important one,

no less than a considerable annuity settled upon her by a man of high rank.

She had, it seems, been his mistress : but his parents, desirous of marrying him to a rich heiress, had prevailed upon him to forsake her ; which he did very reluctantly, after making a handsome provision for her.

But his parents, who did not approve of this alienation, instituted a law-suit in order to recover it ; and would have succeeded, but for the zeal and activity of our young magistrate.

So important a service merited undoubtedly some returns : he became in his turn a solicitor, and was not refused.

But as previous to the winning of her suit, her circumstances were very narrow, and as the fees of lawyers and attornies were a continual drain upon her purse, she was fain to replenish it by the only means that were left, the sale of her charms to a secret admirer ; who supplied her with what was necessary to defray the charges of the law.

This friend was a very debauched man : his riches enabled him to revel among the women

that were venal ; and his taste led him to seek them indiscriminately every where.

As people of this disposition are liable to an infinity of dangers, he did not escape them ; he contracted a violent distemper, and communicated it to his fair companion.

She was ignorant of her situation, when the loving instrument of her success had been favoured with her embraces : he consequently became a sharer in her misfortune.

On the discovery of what had befallen him, instead of expressing any anger, or ill-will to the damsel, he conceived the design of turning the matter to a jest, and of making it a subject of public pleasantry.

In order to compass this end the more effectually, he merrily proposed to her to assist him in the scheme he had in view, as without her co-operation it could not possibly take effect.

This scheme was to bring into the same situation with himself, two or three more young gentlemen of the law of his own degree, who had equally befriended her, by strengthening his decision

decision in her favour with the addition of their own.

As they had done this through his intercession, and chiefly to oblige him, he jocosely argued that they had an equal right to the same recompence with himself.

But what was his astonishment, when the damsel told him, that though gratitude would have prevented her from coinciding with a proposal, which she doubted not he made in meer jest, yet he needed not bemoan himself for want of companions in adversity: that the friends whom he wished to participate in the donation she had made him, had already received it as unintentionally and innocently on her part as he had himself.

Our young judge was wonderfully elated with this news: he sent his compliments to his fellow sufferers, assuring them that he felt a particular satisfaction to hear, that the rewards due by the lady for their exertions in her favour, had been distributed so impartially.

I have heard several other tales of the intrigues carried on by the young gentlemen of rank and interest in the law; but let this one suffice.

A tete a tete with a pretty French woman, is a dangerous position for a man upon whose integrity she means to make an assault.

But if she is dangerous in such a predicament, how much more so must she be, when she intercedes in a good cause, or when she assumes the part of mediatrix in behalf of one against whom there is no pre-possession.

The French ladies possessed of beauty and liberal accomplishments, are, it must be allowed, almost invincible in the field of contest upon any point they have earnestly at heart. It is in a manner impossible to resist the imperceptible ways they have of winding themselves, as it were, into your good graces. They flatter and cajole, it is true, but then it is so gracefully, that although you cannot fail to perceive, that more is said than you deserve, yet the picture is so agreeable, that like one who pays with pleasure a painter who has drawn a flattering resemblance, you cannot refuse the reward due to the pains taken, to represent you to yourself in the most favourable colours.

Their sagacity in these matters is admirable and worthy of particular investigation. Time, person, place, and circumstances are attended to, and weighed with the most exact and scrupulous nicety. In their reasonings and endeavours to persuade

persuade, they take peculiar care not to exceed the bounds of plausibility and discretion, and in the midst of the many civil things they have to say, and of the complaisant behaviour they so engagingly assume, they are equally studious to avoid abjectness, or gross adulation.

This frame of mind, in women of rank in France, is far from being uncommon. Their daily interference in business of the last importance, shews that, if their countrymen complain of their arrogance for meddling in such matters, they cannot deny them dexterity, in obtaining so considerable a share in the management of them; since it requires no small portion of abilities to insinuate themselves so far into the favour and opinion of men, as to induce these to grant them a participation in the affairs with which they are entrusted.

This active and intriguing disposition among the French women of quality, was eminently conspicuous in France during the last century. That kingdom was then remarkably governed by female influence, as it is indeed partly at all times. The names of the celebrated ladies who figured in the political world at that æra would fill pages. It was not only in France their talents were exercised; they extended far abroad. We read in the histories of those times, of wo-

men who were employed in supporting the interests of France in foreign courts. We read even of one who was actually commissioned to perform the functions of a minister plenipotentiary in that of Poland.

This country seemed at that time to have been particularly singled out, for the scene whereon to display and signalize their superior ascendancy over mankind. Exclusive of the lady last mentioned, there were several others in that kingdom, who made a very eminent figure; and whose accomplishments were such, as to induce the first personages of the realm to strive with each other, who should have the preference in conferring upon them the title of wives.

Among these it may not be amiss to take notice of two that eclipsed all the rest by the splendour of their destiny.

The first was Louisa, daughter to the Duke of Nevers, a woman of sublime understanding, and most enterprising spirit. She was the admiration of the whole court of Lewis the Thirteenth, and might have commanded the homages of any man she pleased in her own country: but fate had pre-determined she should wear a crown: she became accordingly the consort of Uladislas, the last monarch of that name

name in Poland; and after his demise, she married his brother and successor Casimir, the last also of his name.

No princess ever supported her rank with more dignity, and shewed more capacity in the conducting of the most arduous affairs. She lived at a time, and in the midst of a nation that were equally tempestuous; she had obstacles to surmount, in the execution of the many designs which she formed and brought to pass, that required the greatest talents, and the firmest perseverance: she displayed both in an extraordinary degree; and enjoyed the reputation of being a person of consummate knowledge in the art of government, as well as of a noble disposition in whatever related to her exalted station. She was no less qualified at the same time, for the purposes of domestic happiness: chearful, witty; affable, generous, and what compleats the amiableness of her character, most tenderly beloved by both her husbands.

The second was the no less celebrated Mary, daughter to the Marquis of Arquien. She was maid of honour to the forementioned Louisa, who perceiving in this young lady a conformity of disposition to her own, took her into the highest

highest favour, and distinguished her upon all occasions,

Mary soon became an object of competition among the Polish grandees. She honoured at last with her hand Prince Radzivil, head of one of the most illustrious families in Poland.

On this husband's decease, the great John Sobieski, at that time Grand Marshal of Poland, became her suitor. She married him, and shortly after, on his elevation to the throne, was conjointly, at the ceremonial of his coronation, crowned queen of Poland. An honour which had not been always conferred on the consorts of kings; but which she was adjudged worthy of receiving.

Two successive queens of Poland, both of them French ladies, form an event very deserving of remark.

In other countries, in Germany especially, sovereign princes and personages of the highest rank, have often been captivated by the charms and engaging qualities of French ladies, so far as to contract honourable connexions with them.

All

All this proves, that if they are inferior in point of beauty to the women of some other countries, still they are not deficient in those endowments that win the affections of men, perhaps more readily than the most faultless and beautiful person.

No wonder therefore, their countrymen should think them so alluring, and represent them as completely versed in the art of making what impressions they please, on the minds of those of whom they are desirous to effect a conquest.

When superiority of comeliness, possessed by the fair sex in foreign parts, is mentioned among the French gentlemen, their usual reflexion is, that an equal advantage in their own women, would render them too much mistresses of mankind; and might be attended with very fatal consequences; among a people so warmly devoted to womankind as the French are universally acknowledged to be.

There is, in their opinion, no necessity for the least increase of the personal charms which they already possess: they understand the management of them so perfectly, that they can give them an appearance far beyond their reality.

A French

A French woman may in these respects be compared to a skilful œconomist, that knows how to make a little go a great way.

What with taste in dress, elegance of deportment, affability of behaviour, and sprightliness of conversation, a man must be very prying indeed, to find out defects, which are so well covered and concealed by so many agreeable substitutes.

Such is the argument used by the French, to diminish the objection so often urged by foreigners, by the English especially, that though the mind may be sometimes enchanted, the eye seldom suffers fascination from the French women.

Numbers of the French differ widely from the notion of so much deficiency in this article among their women, as is contended for in other nations.

Nor will they allow the rectitude of those ideas concerning beauty, which confine it to its bare existence, without including its exertion.

An individual, say they, may be possessed of a large fund of good qualities, without deserving the least commendation, if they lie dormant and unexercised.

In

In the same manner, the bare possession of beauty entitles its owner to no admiration, while unaccompanied with that spirit and brilliancy, which alone can give it life and efficacy.

A meer beauty is a meer picture, which we may admire for the tint and colouring; but at which we feel no more emotion, than at the sight of the finest portrait that ever was taken from nature, or formed by imagination.

These allegations are certainly just, and founded on experience. A proof of their validity, is the amazing facility with which some women, who have but a tolerable share of personal agreeableness, are able to create the fondest attachments.

If one may be allowed to refine on this subject, the French women may be said, in default of beauty, to have borrowed the famous girdle of Venus, which hid all defects, and enhanced all perfections in the eye of a lover. By the magic power which they derive from the wearing of it, they deceive their admirers into a perception of charms, whose creation and existence depend upon the illusion produced by blandishments on one side, and by corresponding fondness on the other.

But

But without enlarging on this matter, it may be said, that as love is in a great measure the child of caprice, the motives of attachment to womankind, are influenced by the particular humour predominant in various individuals. What pleases some, has little influence over others. For that reason, those women who possess the largest combination of excitements to cheerfulness and pleasure, will always have the greatest number of admirers.

According to this maxim, beauty being but one of the many inducements that command the attention of men, they who have a multitude of others, may very well find them an ample substitution; and meet of course with much more admiration and attachment, than such as have beauty and little else.

The fact is, that the allurements which women attain by art, are in many cases more prevalent than those which flow from pure nature.

Simplicity may be a strong charm for some; but people who live much in the world, require something cogenial to the disposition they have contracted by mixing a great deal in society.

Now

Now the French, and such as pay frequent visits to their country, are usually delighted with busy active scenes of life, wherein sometimes much dexterity and shrewdness are practised: hence these become of value to those who live in the midst of such scenes; and they who are acquainted with them, acquire an additional merit in the eyes of those who see their use and feel their necessity.

The French women, therefore, who compose so essential a part of the busy world in France, and are so well conversant in its ways, cannot fail being supremely acceptable to persons of this description.

The French are in truth enchanted with the acuteness and cunning of their countrywomen. Far from being kept at a distance by the apprehension of their wiles, it is precisely in those they chiefly find their amusement. They seem, as it were, to vie with them in depth of skill and penetration, in regard to the schemes and finesses that take place in the intercourse between the sexes.

All this constitutes a pastime highly delectable to both parties: 'Tis like a game where the players have agreed mutually to cozen and entrap each other to the utmost of their ingenuity.

I mean

I mean no more by this in general, than the innocent freedoms and levities which flow from wantonness of mirth, and in which people of a jocose turn are prone to indulge themselves. Not indeed, but it may happen, that in more serious occurrences, there are sometimes people of so depraved a disposition, as to enjoy a trial of duplicity, and to extract merriment from transactions, in which both sides should feel equal shame, for being concerned.

In their connexions with the fair sex, the French look for every endeavour on the part of these to captivate them: they would deem themselves unkindly used, and rather, slighted, if the women did not exert themselves to the utmost; in a word, if they did not discharge all the artillery of their charms against them.

This is a compliment which their natural vanity requires, and which it always meets with. The tricks and set-offs of a French woman are innumerable: she omits nothing either in dress, deportment, or discourse, that is conducive to the purpose of subduing the man she proposes to conquer; and it were pity, considering the pains she takes, that she should miss of her aim.

Nature and art are both summoned upon this occasion to lend their combined aid. She plies
you

you with smiles, with looks of complacency, with an aspect full of predilection: her eyes sparkle with vivacity, and her attitudes are graceful and enchanting: all the little airs and motions that are allowable in a female, are practised to the best advantage, and in such a manner as to shew her in a pre-possessing variety of lights.

If her exterior is so captivating, her address and speech is far more transcending. Her whole attention is directed to impress you with a persuasion of her partiality in your favour. If you are possessed of any brilliant quality, either of body or of mind, she mentions it with a delicacy of praise, and introduces it with so much ease, that you hardly know what delights you most, the commendation or the manner of bestowing it. She unaffectedly coincides with your sentiments, and expresses her own so conformably to what she apprehends will prove similar to your way of thinking, that there seems to have subsisted a congeniality of ideas and inclinations between both, previous to this agreeable communication.

Such is the system adopted by French ladies whose designs are to enthrall. They all excell more or less in the talent of compassing this great and material end with most of the sex.

R

They

They whose education is liberal, and whose outside is comely, are (it must be confest) in general, models of true and genuine eloquence; which consists equally in matter and manner, and cannot be perfect, unless the delivery is accompanied by a graceful person.

But even they who come in but for a secondary share of those qualifications, acquit themselves with a dexterity which seldom fails of success.

The native sprightliness of the women of this country, is a natural kind of eloquence; that stands them in the stead of all reasoning and argument, and wins the assent of those who experience it, by the satisfaction and pleasure which it affords them.

After expatiating on the elocution and persuasive powers of their countrywomen, the French heavily lament, that from the perpetual frequentation of the men, they have imbibed an unconscionable proportion of that dissembling spirit, of which our sex has so often made them feel the fatal effects.

Fraud and circumvention on the part of the men, were once the everlasting complaint of the women; but if you will believe the French, their countrywomen have now fairly turned the
tables

tables upon them, and exceed them in the science of dissimulation.

They accuse them of having banished from their thoughts that innocent simplicity of yore, which usually guided their actions, and rendered them conscientious in their words and promises.

But these are now no longer to be relied upon: they have not only followed the example of men in making too slight of these; but they have done worse, they reckon them of no signification at all.

This indeed is a grievous charge upon their countrywomen. It is however a very general one; and is perhaps the true reason why they are so ready to falsify their own vows of truth and constancy, and to change so often the objects of their devotion.

I apprehend the reality is, that the women of France copy rather too faithfully the pattern set them by the men; and that if these would return to fidelity, they would as closely follow them. This I suppose indeed, is the general rule throughout mankind.

In former days, however, when the men were more faithful, the women were more virtuous.

In the mean time, as good is occasionally produced out of evil, the men are willing to own, that from having learned dissimulation, their women have found it necessary to learn also discretion and secrecy.

These two qualifications, we may charitably hope, must have considerably diminished the practice of dissembling; for which they who are discreet and secret can hardly have any use.

Possibly this dissimulation, so displeasing to the men, may be no more than a shield of defence against their snares: it may amount to no more than an adequate return of verbal civilities without meaning, for the many compliments of the same nature, of which the men are so profuse in their intercourse with the fair sex.

In this case the complaint of dissimulation on the side of the women, becomes a matter of praise to them; and shews that they have had the prudence to adopt the same methods of repelling the men, which these have employed to attack them.

The French have another charge of a very particular nature against their women.

In former days, the ladies, however desirous of seeing the men at their feet, indulged this propensity

propensity from the pardonable motive of receiving the homages due to their charms. Love, pleasure, and vanity, were their principles that animated their endeavours to triumph over mankind; and they sought only the satisfaction of being ladies paramount of their affections.

But a strange metamorphosis has been wrought of late years in the disposition of the fair, which has transformed them into beings of quite another description than that we have just given.

Instead of coveting the adoration of the men from the motives above enumerated, they are now inspired by the demon of ambition; they aim at the conquest of hearts, for the purpose of enslaving the mind, in order to effect those schemes which they take such delight in multiplying upon their hands.

The lust of power and dominion has now taken possession of their ideas, and supplanted those sentimental attachments that used to characterise them.

To this transformation the French attribute the decline of that warmth and duration, which once attended the connexions formed between men and women.

Formerly a mistress long remained the unrivalled sovereign of her admirer; as with few exceptions may be verified, by recurring to the Chronicles of Love and Gallantry, in the last and in the foregoing centuries.

As far as my enquiries in such matters may reach, and I have taken some pains, the French are not destitute of foundation, in saying, that less of constancy accompanies the loves and gallantries of modern days.

But whether more of ambition prevails in the motives that influence women upon these occasions, is not an assertion quite so clear.

I am inclined to Pope's opinion, that the love of pleasure and the love of sway is the *primum mobile* of womankind. I believe too, that with very little variation, it is the acting principle in all women, from an Empress queen, to the commonest character in female life.

Let us evolve the histories of those famous women that figured in centuries past: we find them not only fond, but tenacious of power; striving with all their might to obtain, and most resolutely obstinate in retaining it.

What

What stronger examples of indefatigableness and perseverance in this respect will the male list of heroes and conquerors afford, than those which the list of female heroines is able to exhibit ?

If we look back to antiquity, what think you of a Semiramis, an Olympias, a Cleopatra, and numberless others, which it were needless to enumerate ?

If we consult modern annals, where shall we find more striking instances of unyielding ambition, than in Margaret of Waldemar, in her namesake of Anjou, queen to our Henry the Sixth, in Catherine of Medicis, consort to Henry the Second of France ?

I have quoted these because they are noted characters, such as will, I think, strike you with conviction at first sight, that ambition, and the lust of dominion, flame with as much violence in a female bosom, as in that of a man.

If we descend from thrones to less exalted stations, what powerful examples shall we meet of women exerting uncommon abilities, and straining every nerve in support of the cause they have espoused.

In R 4

In the civil wars of France, in the 16th and 17th centuries, women were perpetually at the bottom of the numerous projects carried on by both sides.

In the civil wars of England, during the last century, and we may truly say, in all the civil wars waged in this kingdom, women have always taken a decided part; and if not openly, have secretly been the springs of many of the motions of the contending parties.

Women of gallantry are, perhaps of all others, the fondest of power. The most famous were not less remarkable for the captivation of their admirers, than for their propensity to be great and powerful.

Of this we have celebrated proofs in the well-known Elfrida, mistress and queen to Edgar, one of the most noted of our Saxon kings—in the no less notorious Padilla, the mistress of Peter, King of Castile, a prince whose licentiousness went hand in hand with his barbarity—in Diana of Poitiers, the favourite of Henry the Second of France, whom she governed with absolute sway.

These three were unquestionably as ambitious and as haughty females as any upon record:
the

the two first especially stopped at nothing to maintain themselves in their elevation, and were no less violent and vindictive than beautiful.

In later times, an immoderate thirst of power had almost always characterised women who have figured in the same line, though with inferior splendour.

The court of Lewis the Fourteenth was not deficient in women who aimed at, though they did not attain to the summit of authority.

But unfortunately for England, the court of Charles the Second was, in a great measure, under the rule of women that had obtained an ascendancy over that indolent monarch. His incredible subserviency to the Duchess of Portsmouth in particular was the cause of much mischief.

The truth is, that power being the only title by which females in such a situation can become respected, they in consequence omit nothing to secure as much of it as they can possibly arrive at, in order to efface, as it were, the idea of the disreputableness of their connexions, by the lustre which is always annexed to influence and command.

It

It is always observable, that the less affection a woman entertains for the man whom she has captivated, the more desirous she is of direction and controul.

Madam de Montespan, whose thirst of domineering was manifest, and whose haughtiness lost her at last the good graces of Lewis the Fourteenth, had nothing of the sentimental attachment for that prince, which was visible in the tender-hearted and beautiful La Valiere, whom her superior ascendancy over that monarch discarded.

It is no less remarkable, that in the dissolute court of our Edward the Fourth, the woman who had the sincerest passion for him, the unfortunate Jane Shore, had not the least mixture of ambition or pride in her composition.

May we not infer from these instances, that where much love subsists, little ambition will remain; and that where the first of these passions reigns in full force, the second will hardly be felt at all,

According to this axiom, when the French complain so heavily of the loss of that primitive simplicity of inclinations, which linked people together from no other views than of personal attachment,

tachment, we are led to conclude from this very declaration, that avarice and ambition are the chief basis of their modern gallantry.

When unlawful connexions between the sexes are made the mediums of ambitious or lucrative schemes, they become the causes of the very worst of corruptions, that of both heart and mind.

The infirmity of human nature is such, that passions and desires for beautiful objects, however censurable when not restrained within legal limits, are yet more deserving of pity than indignation, while prompted by no other motive than personal charms and inducements.

Pursuant to this idea, it is far from unreasonable to think, that people who are guilty of no more than indulging this weakness from reciprocal fondness, however blameable in this particular, may yet remain possessed of a multitude of the noblest qualities and the most exalted virtues.

But when intercourses of this kind are carried on from other views, they must necessarily debase the soul, and extinguish those finer feelings that are utterly incompatible with mean purposes,

purposes, and that cannot exist together in the same breast with prostitution and venality.

If the gallantry, which is now so diffused among the fashionable world in France, is founded principally upon interested prospects, it argues a woeful degradation of their character, and represents them in a light far more derogatory to their pretensions of refinement, than they seem to be aware of, who are so forward in accusing them of such practices.

Let us hope therefore, for the honour and dignity of human nature, that there is more of precipitation and of wantonness than of truth in so severe an accusation, and that the French, in the midst of that volatility which governs their devotion to the fair, meet with no other causes for transferring so frequently their attachment from one to another, than what originates in their own inconstancy.

Let us hope that the French ladies are not less amiable than they used to be, and that the present race has not degenerated from the past in generosity and disinterestedness. These qualities have in general been very justly attributed to their predecessors; however they might deviate from strictness in some duties, they always bore the reputation of being friendly and mag-

magnanimous, and above despicable considerations: let us hope that their gallantry, if in reality so extensive as it is represented, receives no additional contamination by the admixture of coarser passions; and that, if from levity and unguarded gaiety of disposition, they are led into excesses, still they may have the satisfaction of reflecting, that their errors proceeded from weakness and not from perversity.

Whatever concomitances attend their gallantry, it is, in the opinion of the French, much greater than ever. The *tete a tete* chronicle of Paris is plentifully supplied with anecdotes and adventures of this sort, many of them highly amusing from their oddity.

When I speak of a *tete a tete* chronicle, do not mistake my meaning. The press at Paris is not at liberty to divulge those mysteries that we disclose with so much licentiousness and impunity in our London periodical papers and publications.

I mean no more than the conveyance from mouth to mouth of the manifold stories that fill up the leisure of idle people. I may perhaps regale you with some, if I can light upon any that may be worth selecting.

In

In spite of the accusations which the men so readily frame against them, no women form more solemn pretensions to strictness and regularity in essentials; they are studious in their discourses to keep up the fairest appearances, and to give no handle for censure.

This is the more deserving of attention, as they are much freer in their actions and habits than the women of perhaps any country; what in some parts of Europe would be esteemed inconsistent with the laws of modesty, is looked upon among them as innocent, and entirely proper and becoming.

It is not the privilege of any nation to dictate the rules of propriety to another; but there are some ideas, which though not demonstrably infallible, approach so near to rectitude, or which, to say the worst of them, err, if they do err, so much on the safe side of the question, that in dubious cases it is much more adviseable to adhere to them than to their contraries.

Of this nature are those ideas of modesty, that have been adopted, for instance, by the English. A modest behaviour is so highly necessary for the preservation of the virtue which it represents, that it cannot be too much encouraged and inculcated; they who imagine that real purity
may

may flourish without its aid, might as well pretend that armour is of no defence against wounds in battle.

What is modesty in mere words and expressions, if the most essential part be wanting, guardedness in behaviour, and an abstinence from all deeds that carry with them some species of looseness and levity?

Deeds and habits of this kind in men, excite free thoughts in those women who behold them; but, when adopted by women, they set imagination to work, and create the loosest ideas in male witnesses.

It is principally for women that the strictest and severest rules of modesty are absolutely requisite: it is ridiculous to fancy that they who slight and neglect them will not be sufferers.

The omission of any thing enjoined by those rules, is the relinquishment of one of the securities of virtue, and the holding out of an advantage to those who triumph in the perpetration of vice, and who will not fail to improve it.

While temptations are out of sight, even the most profligate may remain guiltless; but where incitements

incitements are offered, even the most virtuous are liable to transgress.

Let not the French women therefore undervalue the extreme circumspectfulness in ways and manners, so strongly recommended in England, and so scrupulously practiced by every English woman that has any pretensions to a character: the observance of them is indeed no incontrovertible proof of either unviolated or inviolable virtue; but certainly the prepossession in favour of female purity, is much greater when accompanied with every outward sign of its existence, than when divested of those concomitances that are usually expected to attend it.

They who have seen the effects of the liberties assumed by French women in their ordinary course of living, will not, unless they are totally frenchified, think it a matter of indifference, how far a woman casts off restraints in behaviour.

The natural consequence of throwing off these reserves, is that the bars to prevent an improper approximation between the sexes, being broke asunder, the men are invited, as it were, to lay aside all ceremony on their side.

I need not tell you how ready they are to obey the invitation, nor describe their keenness in seizing every opportunity to put themselves on a footing of almost unbounded familiarity.

The real unexaggerated truth is, that all freedoms are allowed, saving one, as the gentlemen themselves scruple not to say; but were we to consult our own eyes and feelings on many occasions, we should hardly be charitable enough to suppose that this one was excepted from the list of favours, after witnessing the lengths they so unceremoniously go, in the playful dalliance they are not in the least ashamed of holding, even in the presence of company.

It is not saying too much, to assert that the behaviour of many French women, who claim a fair and spotless reputation, is sometimes less cautious and guarded, than that of many of those unfortunate women among us, who derive a public subsistence from their beauty.

I will not dispute the possibility of a woman being pure and upright in the midst of all these temptations: but a bare possibility, and it certainly can be no more, is a poor comfort to a man who is interested in the character of a woman; and whom we must naturally suppose

S

desirous

desirous of seeing her not only virtuous in reality, but clear of all suspicion.

But is it in the power of a man, were he ever so inclined, to think a woman perfectly chaste, who is perpetually exposed to be perverted, who encourages, by a variety of freedoms, those men who are the aptest to be the instruments of her perversion, who furnishes them with incessant opportunities, and whose whole life and conversation is made up of those levities that awaken in men a confidence and presumption of succeeding in their attempts?

Whatever the French women may alledge, in vindication of the liberties they take, and which the men are so willing to allow them, still the question recurs, to what intent are the women so fond of granting those favours to men, which must necessarily inflame their passions, and excite their desires and efforts to obtain more?

Chastity may be divided into four branches, of mind, body, words, and manners. While the first is sound, the second will remain uncorrupted; but then we should not forget, that corruption in this case begins at the extremities: if either words or manners are contaminated, the mischief soon spreads like an infection, and

and flies up to the mind, from whence it is speedily communicated to the body.

According to this method of arguing, which is grounded upon continual experience, how can the partisans of that libertinism of deportment, as one may justly call it, have the confidence to assert, that it proves nothing against the innocence of those who practice it?

As it is from appearances we are to judge in general of realities, so it is from manners we are to decide upon people's morals. There are doubtless exceptions in all general rules; but they do not invalidate the rule itself.

When the manners of individuals are dissolute, we have therefore an indisputable right to conclude that their morals are similar: exceptions may take place; but it is not by these we are to guide ourselves in the ideas we form of the characters of men and things.

I have been rather severe upon this occasion; but we cannot resist with too much warmth the endeavours of such as wish to introduce into this island a similitude of behaviour in our fair countrywomen, to that which they have observed among our French neighbours.

Such an innovation would soon be followed by a licentiousness of maxims, and a relaxation of that decorum, which alone counterbalances in woman kind the want of many of those accomplishments on which some women so highly value themselves; but which, however brilliant and alluring, do not, in the apprehension of the judicious, sufficiently compensate for the absence of modesty and reserve in the fair sex.

It is the complaint of the thinking part of our nation, that our women already betray too much proneness to imitate their neighbours, not only in their dresses and fashions, but in what is an object of far more serious consideration, the levity of their behaviour:

Certain it is, that the frequent tours to France, of late years become so frequent, have produced no good to this country. While women were not of the party, the evil was much less, as the men usually brought little more of absurdity home than they had carried out: but it is not so with our women; their superior beauty renders them objects of almost idolatry among the French: every snare is laid to decoy them, that ingenuity, prompted by passion, can suggest.

But

But if they escape the men, they cannot avoid falling into the hands of the women, whose politeness and good humour will soon charm them imperceptibly into an imitation of their ways.

Now, as neither the deportment of the men, nor the corresponding manners of the women in France, are desirable objects of importation, the less we are tempted to fetch them over, the better it is most certainly for a people, who wish, for a variety of substantial reasons, to retain the plainness of their own manners, and to keep at a distance from those pretended refinements in the exterior habits of intercourse, and in the system of living, which always degenerate into expensiveness and effeminacy.

The danger of following the examples we see in France is the greater, as the people take so much pains to impress foreigners with the highest notions of their superior justness and propriety.

In other countries, travellers are much less liable to be inveigled into an adoption of the ideas and customs prevailing among the natives. These are satisfied if strangers pay them the compliment of conformity to their usages, while they sojourn among them, and are at no trouble to recommend them to their future preference to any other.

But

But the French are not so constituted; they not only praise and extol their own notions as preferable to those of any other people, but will hardly allow foreigners to think otherwise. Unless a man either explicitly, or at least tacitly assents to what they are pleased to say upon these subjects, he runs the chance of being thought deficient both in taste and good manners.

From expatiating so largely on the merit of these matters, they proceed to enforce the propriety of conforming to them; and with opportunity and importunity, they seldom fail to procure disciples and followers in almost every thing that is of use and in vogue among them.

If the men are dextrous in their methods of insinuating their ideas into the minds of foreigners, the women are equally more expert and zealous.

As soon as they become acquainted with a foreign lady, they directly begin by insisting on the necessity of furnishing herself with all the appurtenances requisite to make the same figure as one of themselves: they solicitously carry her to every shop of eminence for the richest and rarest commodities employed in the decoration of the sex. They accompany her to the consultation of every person who is to have a hand
in

in the fitting her out. In short, they neglect nothing to convince her that France is the country, whither women should come to learn the art of being elegant in their appearance and attire.

When we reflect on the consequences resulting from this solicitude and care both in the French men and in the French women, that few people are able to resist their applications in their own country, and that many imbibe a prepossession for all these objects, that remains ever after; good policy should restrain those manifold visits to that country, which are not only so needless, but so detrimental to our own in a variety of lights.

It is not only in a moral view, that one may venture to condemn our frequent trips, as they are called, to that part of the continent: our trade, our manufactures, our whole commercial interest suffers through them.

As we live in an age, when political views in travelling are more than ever insisted on and held out to gentlemen who go abroad for their improvement, they cannot be too much forewarned of the necessity, of not suffering themselves to be imposed upon by the specious pretences of a rival nation, and to remember, that

as

as they do not leave their country with an intention never to return, they ought not to submit implicitly to the notions and regulations of foreigners in things which, though indifferent in themselves, are quite otherwise in the scale of reference between different states.

It is chiefly upon this footing, perhaps, that if ever the legislature interposes, it will found its reasons for prohibiting those unnecessary and pernicious excursions, that seem epidemical in the people of fashion in this island.

Baron Pollnitz, in whose days the rage of rambling was not so extensive nor contagious, expresses the utmost surprize at this strange Rabies in the English nation. His words are peculiarly remarkable, and testify how feelingly he was attached to this country and its inhabitants. "I am amazed, says he, that any Englishman possessed of a competency, can prevail upon himself to quit his country; which, however, several of them do, who seem to prefer to England countries much less the favourites of nature. I will frankly acknowledge, that had I a revenue but of a thousand pounds a year, I would not accept of the most brilliant offers that fortune might make me elsewhere."

I am

I am not unapprized that a pretext for running out of the kingdom, is the benefit expected from the several watering places upon the continent.

But here again I will beg leave to recur to the authority of Pollnitz; who observing the great numbers of English at the German Spa, while he was there, could not contain his astonishment at their relinquishing such preferable waters at home.

The only rational inducement to go abroad, is the recovery of health through change of air, or the acquisition of political knowledge, and improvement in the science of mankind.

But while people propose to themselves no other end than a jaunt of pleasure, or the sight of curiosities, it were far more consistent with the interest of their country, as well as their own, that this restless disposition were somewhat restrained.

To persons of this turn, England offers a much more agreeable variety of places where to spend their money and pass their time conveniently and pleasurably, than they can find beyond sea,

I will

I will conclude this Letter by remarking, that the greatest advantage a sensible Englishman derives from seeing foreign countries, is the knowledge he thereby acquires of the incomparable superiority of his own.

But here again I will beg leave to recur to the authority of Pollius; who observing the great numbers of English at the German Sea, while he was there, could not contain his astonishment at their retarding such precious time as they were at home.

The only rational inducement to go abroad, is the recovery of health through change of air, or the acquisition of political knowledge, and improvement in the science of mankind.

But while people propose to themselves in other and than a faint of pleasure, or the sight of curiosities, it were far more consistent with the interest of their country, as well as their own, that this selfish disposition were somewhat restrained.

To persons of this sort, England offers a much more agreeable variety of places, where to spend their money, and pass their time, contentedly and pleasantly, than they can find

L. E. T.

I will

L E T T E R XVI.

Avarice and Ambition in Men the fundamental Reasons, why there is less of Gallantry in Republics than in Monarchies—the French more addicted to it than ever—French Ladies partial to Men of Merit—Anecdotes of three Ladies.

I TOOK notice in my last, that the French looked upon their women as more addicted to gallantry than ever.

At this no man who examines the situation of that country and nation in times past, and compares it with the present, will testify the least surprize.

Nations are often influenced by their political circumstances, not only to virtue or to vice in general, but to particular virtues or vices.

Forms of government are also marked by peculiar characteristics, that in some instances forcibly discriminate the inhabitants of one country from those of another.

In

In republican governments, the leading virtues of the people are love of liberty, and attachment to their country.

In monarchies men are distinguished by their respect and fidelity to their princes, and their prompt obedience and submission to their rulers and superiors.

On the other hand, the prevailing vices in a commonwealth are avarice and ambition. Those that are aptest to flourish in a monarchy, are idleness and gallantry.

Experience has uniformly confirmed these assertions. Antiquity and modern times concur to prove them: the Athenians, and most of the other Grecian republics, especially such as were commercial, were remarkably diligent in laying up hoards of money. This amassing spirit inspired no less the rulers of the state, than private individuals. The avaricious disposition and infamous practices to enrich themselves, even of some of the most illustrious personages among that celebrated people, are too well known to need recording.

The Carthaginians were not inferior to the Athenians in the science of accumulating riches.

These

These indeed were the only means of becoming respected, and of obtaining the interest of the commonality.

Their rivals and conquerors, the Romans, exceeded them at last even in this, as they equally did in most of their virtues and vices. The rapacity of these latter became at last proverbial; and the whole world was not sufficient to satisfy it.

For the truth of all this, we need only appeal to the records of the respective writers among these nations. We have nothing remaining of what may have been written by the Carthaginians; but such as favoured them most, agree in stigmatizing them for a very avaricious generation. Aristotle in particular treats them with great severity upon this account.

The principal reason, why men are fonder of wealth in commonwealths than in monarchies, is very obvious. It is the only method of procuring friends and followers, and of attaining influence and consideration. It is no less clear that individuals absorbed in the pursuit of money, seldom superadd any other passion to avarice than that of ambition. They indulge the first for the sake of the last.

In

In a kingly government the case is quite otherwise. Riches, however they may procure the comforts and delights of life, are no certain step to power and preferment. The court and its adherents dispose of all things at their pleasure. In such a situation, though money may occasionally be of service in purchasing the favour of the great, yet courtiers, who are generally men of birth and family, are too partially inclined to support persons of the same description with themselves, to take much notice of any others. We accordingly find that in every kingdom in Europe, it is a maxim of state, as it were, to employ in exalted stations none but persons highly born. The exceptions are very few.

The love of money is no less prevalent in modern than in ancient republics; with this difference, that it is not accompanied with an equal degree of ambition. The political aspect of things throughout the world is too much altered, to permit the republics now subsisting to cherish ambitious designs: but the principle remains. The Venetians, two or three centuries ago, and the Dutch in the wars at the commencement of the present, for the succession to the crown of Spain, shewed themselves equally desirous of aggrandizement; though to do them both justice, it was at the expence of those
against

against whom they could not take too many precautions.

If covetousness is the predominant vice in republics, idleness, and it's usual associate, licentiousness between the two sexes, is the principal feature that will strike observers of the ways that prevail in courts and monarchies.

The cause is no less evident, than that of the addiction to pelf among republicans. As these court wealth in order to arrive at power, the others who know its inefficacy to that end, are satisfied with a much less proportion. The utmost of their wish is to acquire a sufficiency for the enjoyments of life. When this is attained, no more is sought, as no more is wanted,

In the mean time, they who are already possessed of that sufficiency, having no other objects to stimulate their endeavours to augment it, think of nothing but of pursuing the paths of every pleasure and gratification that offers: the consequence is, that in courts the mixture of the sexes being almost perpetual, and amusements of every kind succeeding each other in an incessant round, the minds of individuals soon contract that propensity to dissipation and voluptuousness, which extinguishes the principles of strictness and regularity of life.

I thought

I thought it of some utility to trace the causes of that gallantry and loose behaviour, of which the French are accused. That more of it subsists in kingly than in republican states, is clear for the reasons alledged; but whether it is in France so extensively diffused as some may have represented it, will admit of much doubt.

It is among the great, and those who frequent and strive to resemble them, that we most-ly find it: they who live at a distance from them, and have little intercourse with this gay part of the nation, are, in all appearance, not more censurable in these respects than the inhabitants of other countries.

Paris, therefore, and the other seats of government may be considered as the scenes of that libertinism, which some have too unguardedly extended much wider. In the representation of national vices, we should be scrupulously careful to keep within the latitude of exact veracity; for though it may be allowed, for the sake of raising imitators, to amplify virtues, we should cautiously avoid describing the empire of vice as larger than it really is; lest the multitude of its votaries should unhappily prove an encouragement to increase it.

It

It has been observed, that this turn to gallantry is accompanied by a solicitude to appear spotless and undefiled. For this reason, most probably, the freedoms assumed by some women in their open intercourse with men, are not allowed as presumptions against them; otherwise it were impossible for such women to preserve their reputation.

But while no other evidence is admissible than ocular discovery, it is an easy matter to set calumny at defiance: a French lady, therefore, that chuses to indulge her illicit inclinations, has a wide field to range in; and need not apprehend to be stinted for want of sufficient opportunities.

Thus you see, that after we have forsaken virtue, still we are not willing to part with its shadow. A fair character is so precious, that tho' we have no right to it, we resolutely claim it at all hazards, like an income without which we cannot subsist.

The fact is, that in France a lady of unblemished reputation is most particularly prized: As it is with difficulty she steers through the dangers that surround her on every side, she acquires, as well as deserves, distinguished praise.

T

Where

Where virtue is not subject to many temptations, the preservation of it being more easy, is also less reputable than when encountered by many obstructions. Hence in countries where women are debarred those occasions of going astray which are allowed them in others, they certainly cannot claim the same merit, as those who are virtuous in spite of great incitements to the contrary.

The French ladies, therefore, who in the midst of those provocations and facilities to vice, which abound in their stile of living, can rise superior to bad examples, and adhere to their duty with unfeigned fidelity, ought unquestionably to be set up as patterns to the remainder of the sex.

It is not marvellous, that women who are daily witnesses of the homage that is paid to such of them as deserve it, should strenuously endeavour to participate the same honours; and that notwithstanding the consciousness of their demerit, they should labour to screen it as far as circumstances will permit them.

I began this letter by remarking, that the comparison between the French of times past, and those of the present, would countenance the
notion,

notion, that gallantry has gained ground among them.

During the greatest part of the last century, the French were deeply engaged in domestic broils, and foreign wars. They both contributed, the first especially, to martialize the temper of the people, and to wean them from habits of indolence and effeminacy, which are the great cherishers of gallantry.

The French of those days, though licentious enough in their manners, and no less devoted to the fair sex than at present, were not addicted to gallantry in the same sense as now.

There was a manliness in their attachment to women, which rendered it less disgraceful and more lasting. The women were not so coquetish, nor the men so changing.

The feelings of nature, and the dictates of passion, were then more attended to; whereas in the pursuit of women, they are now more prompted by the power of fashion than by the bent of inclination. They loved a woman then for her own sake; but their connexions are now influenced by the vanity of appearing favourites.

As the liberty of the nation, though much impaired, was not finally destroyed, it left in the minds of men, a degree of loftiness that would not suffer them to loiter away their time in a fawning, insignificant attendance upon women. They had too much to employ in other purposes; and though they could love like men, they had not yet assumed the functions of domestic retainers.

In such a situation, though improper attachments took place between the sexes, they did not engross nor effeminate the men, nor destroy the delicacy of sentiments in women.

But gallantry in the present acceptation of the word, is quite another thing: it now means connexions that commence without love, subsist without attachment, and last no longer than till one of the parties has found a new object of curiosity.

Gallantry is in truth the very reverse of what its primitive meaning imported. A man of gallantry was formerly one who devoted himself to the service and protection of the fair. A modern man of gallantry is one who spends his life in trials to seduce as many women as he can have access to. so much has time changed the signification of things.

Let

Let the women, however, complain of the men; seduction, in many instances, is absolutely reciprocal. Little ceremony frequently suffices to bring two persons together, whose knowledge of each other is very recent. There are men and women, such perfect adepts in these matters, that they know each other, as it were, by intuition. Among people of this stamp an alliance is soon concluded, and as soon terminated.

Independent of those motives that proceed from looseness and levity, or from the desire of domineering and succeeding in their schemes, the French have thought proper to brand their women with a far weightier accusation; that of being rather too susceptible of partiality for people of opulence.

They who speak so unfavourably of their countrywomen, cannot surely mean any more than that such instances do sometimes happen, and that there are women in France, as in all countries, open to bribery, and lost to all generous sentiments.

But no person tolerably conversant among the French ladies, will coincide with any opinion that represents them, as more liable to be purchased than any others. Such of them as live irregularly,

irregularly, are actuated by other passions than that of avarice, and are, I believe, very seldom the slaves of lucre in their intrigues with men.

A motive that may more probably influence their adventures of this kind, is the desire of becoming celebrated through the splendour and illustriousness of their admirers. This has, among so vain a people, effected the success of applications which would otherwise have been rejected with scorn.

A man who has rendered himself famous, stands a very good chance of succeeding in France with such ladies as we have been describing.

Neither is it the celebrity arising from feats of arms, dignity of birth and station, or exalted employments, that always decides in favour of a man, either with ladies of gallantry or with those of a stricter character.

There are French ladies so powerfully smitten with eminent merit, in branches of quite another kind, as to prefer men of uncommon abilities and understanding to every other species of admirers.

I was
 that reputation itself, as more likely to be pur-
 chased than any other. Such of them as live
 irregularly

I was a few days since, in company with a very well-informed young gentleman of the army; who entertained us with the following story: as it comes in proof of the above observation, I will here lay before you his whole narrative. I do it the more readily, as though anecdotes of this kind are not uncommon, this is the most curious of any that ever came to my knowledge.

A gentleman of the province of Alsatia, had an only daughter, of whom he was unspeakably fond: exclusive of her being extremely beautiful, nature had given her a disposition that charmed all who were acquainted with her, and a capacity that made her equal to any attainments.

So promising a soil was cultivated with the utmost care and attention, that paternal fondness could bestow. She had hardly entered into her teens, when she was mentioned every where as a prodigy: her accomplishments were not solely of the feminine class; she was skilled in several modern languages, and was perfectly mistress of all the polite compositions in the French.

She continued in the same career of improvement till about her twentieth year; when a fe-

male relation of great rank and fortune obtained her father's permission to take her to Paris, in order to compleat her education, by initiating her into the circles of that capital seat of politeness and gaiety.

She soon became an object of universal admiration in all the companies she frequented ; and what was still more, she had the singular felicity to escape envy. Her behaviour was so affable, her discourse so unpretending, and her manners so captivating, that all the ladies, to whom she was introduced, were at perpetual strife who should possess most of her company.

In this brilliancy of merited attachment and partiality from ladies of the first distinction, it is natural to imagine that she had not passed unnoticed by the gentlemen.

But notwithstanding the beauty of her person caught every eye, it was attended with a reserve, and a seeming consciousness of her worth, as well as of her duty, that precluded improper familiarity ; and kept at a great distance all those who knew not how to ally a becoming freedom of deportment with a due degree of respect, in their intercourse with the sex.

As

As the affection she bore to her father, was founded on those sentiments of gratitude which she had imbibed from her tenderest infancy, she was highly solicitous to take no step whatever in any concerns of importance, without his entire approbation.

This was by no means the result of interested views. Independently of the fortune which it was in his power to leave her, she had in right of her mother, who died while she was an infant, a very considerable inheritance to receive when at age; and she was now bordering on that period.

But the truth was, that her good sense and quickness of perception had long convinced her, that he was not only her best friend, but also her surest guide. He was a man of excellent parts and tried experience; intimately conversant with the world, and not only possess of polite knowledge, but equally master of that which insures prosperity in the management of affairs.

Her judgment was too sound not to see that the happiness of her life was perfectly safe in such hands. She committed herself accordingly to his whole direction, and never omitted asking his advice upon any occasion that she thought required it.

Such

Such unfeigned confidence was repaid on his side by every indulgence her heart could wish. Authority was an idea that never entered into any part of their correspondence: if she submitted herself to his counsel, he no less trusted her to her own discretion; and she never afforded him the least cause of repentance.

In this happy interchange of parental tenderness and filial affection several years elapsed; when the young lady on arriving at full age, quitted Paris, and returned to the residence of her father; in order to be present at the settling and receipt of her succession.

He was now far advanced in years; and though otherwise of a good constitution, had lately been troubled with some infirmities, that warned him of the uncertainty of life.

Strongly desirous not to leave so beloved a daughter unprovided with a companion worthy of her, he opened his mind upon this subject; and told her with the usual frankness and good humour that characterised all his proceedings, that as his stay might be short in this world, and she was now fully able to make a proper choice, he should rejoice in seeing her married before he died.

Her

Her answer contained a perfect and unreserved assent to the propriety of his proposal.

As the old gentleman was of a truly generous disposition himself, he was above encouraging mercenary views in others. He knew that his daughter completely resembled him in this, as in all other meritorious points; and was therefore determined to make her no sacrifice to avarice or ambition.

He gave her therefore to understand that he had not the most distant intentions to bias her inclinations; that he left them free and unconstrained: he was thoroughly convinced of her prudence, and would make that alone her guide in this important business.

Instead of exerting that authority, of which parents are sometimes unreasonably, and often fatally jealous, he assured her, that far from dictating, he would receive more satisfaction in complying with her own wishes on this occasion; entertaining no doubt that she could not fail to do him, as well as herself, the highest credit by her determination.

He then concluded by asking whether among the young gentlemen she had opportunities of conversing

conversing with, any one had been so happy as to make an impression upon her.

Encouraged by his confidence and benignity, she hesitated not in confessing, that she felt a particular predilection for a young gentleman, in whose praise she had often heard him express the greatest warmth. That so much commendation on his part, had powerfully contributed to render the young gentleman acceptable to her; and that she had even sometimes thought, it was not altogether without some such intent, that he commended him so liberally and so frequently.

Her father was charmed upon hearing her make this ingenuous declaration. He acknowledged that of all the young gentlemen he knew, not one was equal to this in every requisite to make a woman happy.

This gentleman was, it seems, an officer of some rank in the corps of Engineers. He was by birth a German, but had been educated in France, where he had lived since his childhood. His father, a man of good family, had long served in the French army, where he had been honourably promoted. Having many sons, the only provision he could make for them, was in the military line: they were all young men of

of respectable character; but the young lady's favourite was incomparably the most accomplished. His education had been excellently superintended: his father, who was a man of letters, had inculcated an early attachment to them into his son; as foreseeing that possibly he might not be able to leave him much other inheritance.

To the endowments of his mind, which were manifold, he added a manly and graceful person: his temper was obliging, his manners polite, and his humour always chearful and gay. Thus accoutred by nature and by art, the young lady who revealed her partiality for him to her father, was not the only one of whom he had been so fortunate as to make a conquest.

After coinciding with his daughter's choice, he begged to know, whether the young gentleman had ever ventured to disclose himself to her. She answered that he had indirectly expressed enough to satisfy her, that nothing but the want of a fortune adequate to her own, stood in the way of his wishes to be permitted to pay her his addresses.

The young gentleman's father had long been an intimate friend of her own; they were much of an age, and greatly resembled each other in disposition

and manners. They had been brother officers in their youth; but the father of our young lady, on the death of a near relation, of whom he was heir at law, coming into the possession of an affluent fortune, retired from the service; but always continued a fast friend to his old companion, for whom he entertained the highest value.

As part of the estate which he inherited, lay in the proximity of Strasburg, his friend, who frequently came through that city, on visits to his relations who dwelt on the German side of the Rhine, as constantly visited him at his country seat; where he often spent many months, and always met with the most cordial and brotherly reception.

Such were the two gentlemen whose son and daughter were mutually enamoured of each other. To do these justice, it was true and genuine love divested of all other motives: could interested considerations have prevailed in each other's bosom, they both might have bettered themselves, in the idea of the mercenary part of mankind.

The two fathers, having consulted together, were happy to find their desires so compleatly corresponded. They both had secretly wished
for

for such an alliance; but they were both men of sentiment and delicacy. The one did not chuse to over-rule his daughter in so tender a point; the other did not incline to disoblige an old friend, by influencing his son to woo the daughter without the father's consent.

The two lovers were in consequence married; and lived together in perfect enjoyment of conjugal felicity during several years. Her husband, by dint of valour and skill in his branch of military knowledge, distinguished himself on a variety of occasions; and would probably have risen very high, had he not been unfortunately slain in Germany, in the course of the last war.

He was in the flower of his age when he fell. She became of course a young widow in the bloom of life.

As they had been models of conjugal duty on each side, they were the praise and admiration of all who knew them. Their many virtues and excellent qualities, their accomplishments of every denomination had raised their character to the highest summit of respect.

Whoever survived of such a pair, could not fail of meeting with devoted admirers. The young lady did not accordingly remain long without

without the most advantageous offers, some of them from persons of the very first distinction.

But as merit alone had determined her first choice, so she seemed as resolutely bent to adhere to the same rule, were she to chuse a second time.

As her own father, and her late husband's were both dead, she was mistress of herself without controul; and could follow her inclinations, without apprehensions of disobliging those whom she had always studied peculiarly to please.

Among the gentlemen of her husband's acquaintance, there was one whom, next to himself, she had treated with most friendship. He was of the same age, and resembled him in many respects. He too had been an officer; but had quitted the service, on his receiving a wound in his leg, that without laming him, still prevented his moving with that speed and activity which military service requires. He was very agreeable in his person, possessed an uncommon share of understanding, excellently cultivated by study and literature: his disposition was full of good nature and jocundity, and his manners were entirely genteel and unaffected.

His

His circumstances indeed were not affluent: a small patrimony, and a moderate pension enabled him to subsist with care and oeconomy; but his mind was endowed with those great substitutes for all deficiencies, temperance and moderation.

Such was the person, on whom, unknown to himself, she thought proper to fix an eye of preference to the various addresses of which she began to be heartily tired.

This gentleman so little expected the honour she intended him, that he was preparing to retire into Languedoc, the cheapest province in France, in order to enjoy his scanty pittance with more comfort; when he found himself diverted from his journey, in a manner equally agreeable and surprising.

He had always testified a warm friendship for her late husband, while their circumstances were on a parity. After his marriage, the connexion had continued, with this singular instance of disinterestedness on the part of the survivor, that notwithstanding the repeated proffers of pecuniary services from his friend, he had declined them; not from sullenness and weak pride, but from the good order and regulation with which he managed his own affairs.

U

With

With this nobleness of soul the lady was thoroughly acquainted, as well as with his many other valuable qualities. She also imagined that she had long discovered in him something more than a mere friendly attachment.

In this conjecture she was not mistaken; women have certainly in these matters, a degree of penetration which often sees deeper into men than they are able, or perhaps willing to see themselves. This, doubtless, is the cause of that ascendancy, which some women can obtain over any man they please.

Before setting out for the place of his retirement, he thought it due to the memory of his departed friend, to take a solemn farewell of his widow; and to express his sense of the obligations she had laid him under, by the continual marks of benevolence he had received from her, in the long course of their mutual acquaintance.

When he waited upon her to this intent, he found her inditing a letter; which, after he had paid his proposed devours, and taken his final leave, she put into his hands, and begged he would peruse at his leisure.

You

You may imagine that his curiosity was not a little excited to know its contents. He was not less surprised on perusing it, to find that his friend's widow was so partially inclined in his favour.

It was short, but said much: it acquainted him, that after consulting herself, she found that no man so nearly resembled the friend she had lost as himself. She wondered after so long, so intimate, and so cordial an acquaintance, he could bid her an everlasting adieu, without inevitable necessity; that she had reason to think he had a stronger regard for her, than his pride and his circumstances would suffer him to acknowledge; that if what she had heard of the opinion he had lately expressed of her was true, he should come and avow it in her presence, if unhappily she was mistaken, she desired he would return the letter, and bury the contents in silence and oblivion.

Some days before, the gentleman had, it seems, been particularly lavish of his praises on her, at an entertainment, where some of the company were lamenting her misfortune, in losing so early in life, so amiable, and accomplished a man as her late husband.

He spoke with uncommon warmth and earnestness on this occasion; and concluded by observing, that women of such exalted merit ought to be rewarded with diadems: that none but kings were worthy of them; and that were he to wish for a crown, it would only be for the sake of placing another on her head.

This compliment soon came to her knowledge and gave her infinite satisfaction. She had long sought for an opportunity of making him acquainted with her own sentiments; but his extreme reserve and modesty, though they could not conceal from the lady's discernment what passed within his mind, still afforded no explicit pretence to declare herself.

I need not say, that after reading her letter he felt himself no ways inclined to bury it in oblivion. He obeyed the lady's summons with due alacrity: he directly waited upon her, confirmed the truth of what had been reported to her, confessed that he had long cherished the highest regard for her person, and that nothing but the immense disproportion of their respective circumstances, had prevented him from making that confession, which her generosity had extorted from him.

The

The conclusion was, that in a few days they were happily united in the bonds of wedlock, to the great joy of all her friends and dependants, but to the surprize of none.

They had long conjectured from the similitude of person and character, from the unaltered friendship that had subsisted between this gentleman and her late husband, and especially from the constant favour and kindness she had invariably manifested for him, that, if ever she took a second partner for life, he certainly would have the preference.

It is with pleasure one hears of people of this character. Neither, as I have already told you, is this the only anecdote of the kind that has come to my hearing.

Events of this nature are a sort of refreshment to the soul; they serve to relieve it from the burden of that indignation, which it is liable to experience on reflecting upon the general baseness and depravity of motives that govern human transactions.

This lady may be proposed as a model of perfect, irreproachable purity in her connexions, such as we may hold out for the imitation of her

sex, as an example without a flaw, finished and compleat in every part.

I will now endeavour to give you a specimen of generous disinterested gallantry; such as while we cannot avoid censuring, we are compelled to admire from its singularity.

Out of several stories in this line I have selected the following, as it appeared to carry the strongest proof, that foibles of this complexion are not inconsistent with the noblest dispositions.

While the late Madam de Pompadour was in the height of her splendour, a gentlewoman recommended to her protection a young niece, of whom she took the most liberal notice.

As the lady, whose relation she undertook to patronize, had been serviceable to her upon some essential occasions, she determined to recompence her amply in the care of this young person.

Exclusive of gratitude, in which she was by no means deficient, any more than in resentment, she had every invitation that nature could afford for the exercise of her bounty.

The

The young gentlewoman possess one of those happy forms that please and interest at first sight. Her shape, her air, her motions, without the least assistance of art, had such a native ease and dignity, that Madam de Pompadour would jocularly say, that she was the secret offspring of a prince.

An education was bestowed upon her quite conformable to the ideas of her protectress, who possessing in a supreme degree the art of commanding the adorations of men, neglected nothing that could make her pupil as perfect as herself.

Her intentions were answered in every point of view; every accomplishment that could render the young lady's person and company enchanting, was taught her by the most skilful masters in each profession. In dancing, and in music, she became a proficient of the first class, and equally ravished the eyes and ears of all who had the pleasure of knowing her.

She made an equal progress in the embellishment of her mind: she devoted no small share of her time to study and reading. Her memory was amazing: she not only retained the sense and purport of all she read, but could recite the most beautiful passages of all the French clas-

fics. In this exercise of her memory her judgment was not less conspicuous: she timed and adapted these passages so judiciously, that she seemed, as it were, to have learned them purposely for the occasions that produced their recital and application.

In the mean time, her vivacity and imagination fully seconded her memory and judgment. She spoke and wrote with an elegance and propriety that astonished the most expert. Her notes and letters were replete with wit and brilliancy; and her conversation pre-possessed all persons in favour of her understanding.

To these enchanting qualifications she added a suavity of temper, and a liveliness of disposition, that poized each other in the justest proportion. She was remarkably attentive in suiting herself to variety of characters: the gay the serious, the learned, the untutored, all relished her company; so well she knew how to divert without offending.

On the decline of the health and spirits of her protectress, the aunt who had recommended her to that lady, having no children, took her home, with an intention to make her sole heiress to her fortune,

She

She had, through the favour of Madam de Pompadour, obtained an employment of great profit for her husband. He was lately dead; and being herself advanced in years, her chief object was to provide for this young lady, in a manner suitable to the education and stile of living to which she had been used.

She was now arrived at that maturity of person and qualifications, which attracts the peculiar notice and homage of the other sex; and renders it necessary for a woman to be guarded and vigilant, in a manner adequate to her beauty and attractions.

Surrounded by admirers, many of them not only young and handsome, but forward and enterprising, prudence dictated to her a restriction of that gaiety, for which she had always been so remarkable. This she now perceived was absolutely requisite, for the establishment of the character which she was desirous of obtaining, that of discretion and circumspectfulness.

In the mean while, her aunt was solicitously engaged in procuring her a splendid settlement in life. As she was rich, and designed to leave all she had to the young lady, she thought herself entitled to deference in a matter of this kind,

kind, from one who depended entirely on her bounty, and of whose primitive rise, and future good fortune, she considered herself as equally the cause and support.

She was one of those busy plodding characters, which, with some portion of ingenuity, but a much greater of low artifice and cunning, push themselves forward wherever they see an opening. As she had no talents above the level of mediocrity, so her feelings were gross and unrefined. Judging of the world as it goes, she fancied that wealth was the test of merit, and that to be affluent was the principal quality that reasonable people ought to aim at, for all the desirable purposes of life.

Fraught with these notions, she would gladly have seen her young niece allied with the heir of some opulent Financier. To this end she applied to the partner in office of her late husband; who still continued in possession of the employment which he formerly shared with him, but now enjoyed alone.

This man had a nephew; of whom, for no other reason, he proposed to make an heir to the riches he had amassed.

Her

Her project was to unite their families and interest by a match between this nephew and her niece; on whom she consented, upon that account, to settle the reversion of her whole fortune, on his doing as much for his nephew.

Between persons so entirely similar in their dispositions as this man and woman were, a bargain of this sort was very expeditiously concluded. The assent of the parties principally concerned, was the matter least considered.

Had the gentlewoman bethought herself of enquiring into the character of her friend's nephew, she must soon have been convinced of the impropriety of uniting him with her relation.

He was a young man not disagreeable in person, nor deficient in understanding; but abandoned to the most profligate debauchery, and lost to all those decorums, that sometimes preserve a man's character from contempt, however he may deserve it.

The only precaution she took, was to settle her money on the person and issue of her niece, so as to secure her from the uncertainty of events.

She

She had been witness to so many of those family dissensions, that compose such capital scenes in what is called the gay world, that she did not chuse to trust her young relation to the caprice of any man.

Having thus provided for the grandeur and felicity of her niece, for whom she had a very great regard in her own way, it next remained to open the business to the young parties themselves.

She found no difficulty to convince her niece, that she had met with a young gentleman entirely suitable to the wishes and expectations, she had so long been forming in her favour. She represented him as young, handsome, and sensible; in short, she painted him in the very colours his uncle had done; who, in hopes that his nephew, on the prospect of an advantageous settlement, might be brought to a reformation, had wholly concealed from the good lady the disagreeable side of the picture.

The young gentlewoman, who felt the dependency of her situation, and relied on the prudence of her aunt, had long determined to be guided by her directions. She accordingly received very civilly the addresses of the young gentleman on his first introduction; and

as he was unexceptionable in his person and manner, felt no repugnance in the acceptance of his hand. But a short lapse of time disclosed a scene that put an end to this fair delusion.

Notwithstanding the honour and felicity of possessing so accomplished a woman, the depravity of his taste soon plunged him into his former debaucheries; from which the charms of his bride had for some time preserved him.

Inchanted with this sudden change of manners, his uncle began to applaud himself for the scheme of matrimony which had effected it, and to promise himself as much comfort, as he had formerly received dissatisfaction.

He soon found, however, that his prospects were transitory. After no more than three months cohabitation with his consort, his nephew absented himself, without giving notice to her, or to his uncle, of the motive of his absence.

A few days were sufficient to apprise the young lady of the true cause of this elopement.

He had unhappily fallen afresh into the company of some of the associates of his debaucheries.

ries. Hurried away by the impetuosity of this renewed torrent, he had again been seduced into a criminal course of life. As the violence and vulgarity of his passions bereaved him of all conduct and precaution, he had not escaped the usual consequences; but what was unspeakably more atrocious, than all the rest of his behaviour, he had communicated them to his unhappy lady.

On the discovery of this iniquitous treatment, she remained some time in the depth of grief and affliction. As she had conceived an affection for him, and now perceived that she must resign forever a man so unworthy of being trusted, so lost to every sentiment of duty and honour, she could not overcome the emotions, to which a tender feeling bosom is naturally subject on so trying an occasion.

Reason and reflexion were long too feeble to operate a cure. Her mind was too depressed to listen to the admonitions of those friends who took pains to convince her, how much injustice she did herself in bemoaning the fate of a wretch who deserved no compassion from her.

She was tormented by a consideration, which the more she resolved the more it became serious and alarming. She was tied for life, and could

could not honourably bestow herself on any future object of her affections.

This to a woman susceptible of the softer impressions, was a consideration very mortifying and distressful. To her it was wholly destructive of happiness.

Nature had given her a loving affectionate heart, constant and faithful to its object; but incapable of felicity without a partner, and insensible to all other enjoyments, while that essential one was wanting!

She became dejected and melancholy; she avoided company and courted solitude and retirement, and employed herself entirely in pen-
sive and lonely occupations.

Happily she had a native turn to study and reading: this is possibly the most propitious fund of relief from adversity of all denominations; she had improved it during her whole life by continual habits of application; and she now experienced it the most powerful support.

From the perusal of grave and moral performances, the transition to compositions of a more chearful tendency was leisurely and gradu-
al.

al. As her mind felt an expansion to gayer ideas, the festivity of her disposition began imperceptibly to return, and her spirits to flow again in their usual channel.

But what chiefly accelerated the cure of this internal malady, was the information she frequently received, of the scandalous licentiousness in which her husband continued to live. She had not, during a long time, entirely given up all hopes of his becoming a penitent. But she was at last convinced by the excesses of which he was daily guilty, that he was thoroughly incorrigible; and that no woman possessed of common prudence, would condescend to any connexion with a man of such an abandoned character.

She therefore took a firm and solemn resolution to dismiss him for ever from her thoughts; and to suffer the intrusion of no concerns whatever upon his account.

After this final reprobation of a man, with whom she clearly foresaw the utter impossibility of living with any comfort, she determined to resume her former gaiety; and to enjoy with cheerfulness the pleasures concomitant upon affluence.

Her

Her aunt was lately dead, and had left her all her riches. She now therefore thought she was very justly entitled to make herself some amends, for the implicit obedience she had paid to that lady, in taking from her hand a husband who had given her so much uneasiness.

She purchased a magnificent house, furnished it sumptuously, hired a competent number of domestics, and lived, in short, in a full state of elegance and splendour.

As she had always been equally respected and beloved by her acquaintance, so they had sincerely sympathized in the heavy misfortune that befel her; and now they no less rejoiced in seeing her disencumbered from such a weight, and in the possession of her former sociableness and good humour.

Her house became in a short time, the resort of the most illustrious characters of both sexes for wit and genius, and every intellectual accomplishment. None but such, indeed, had ever met with much notice from her; as she could not upon every occasion, refrain from expressing a marked aversion for those who were deficient in the requisites of a good education.

Among the gentlemen who frequented this polite circle, there was one with whom she had been many years acquainted. He was a relation of her ancient protectress Madam de Pompadour, at whose house he had frequently seen her. He had traced her ever since in her various progress through life, and had always entertained a liking for her.

She was not unmindful of his notice; but being a dependent orphan herself, and he being occasionally absent on duty with his regiment, sometimes the space of a twelvemonth or longer, they saw each other but accidentally.

He had through the credit of his relation been preferred in the army, while young, to posts that raised him much envy among his senior officers: but his modesty, no less than his courage, extricated him from several very difficult passes; and brought him at last into general favour and esteem.

His person had nothing striking; but he had the air and behaviour of a gentleman; and his countenance bespoke a sensibility and elevation of sentiments, that were no less visible in his discourse, and rendered him highly acceptable in all companies.

He

He had during his residence in garrison laid in a very considerable stock of useful and polite knowledge; in the display of which he was so agreeable and unaffected, that what in others would have appeared pedantic, he had the skill of making a subject of entertainment.

His age was much the same as that of our young lady; he had latterly been moving about the confines of the kingdom, and had not seen Paris for some years.

It was after this long absence, that coming to the capital, to attend the minister in the war department, on some business of promotion, he again waited on his old acquaintance. She was sincerely glad to see him, and received him with unfeigned marks of peculiar satisfaction.

As he was informed of the calamity that had befallen her, he expressed himself with regard to it, in terms of so much warmth and friendship, as made a deep impression on the heart of his friend.

Their connexion was not only renewed, but quickly grew more intimate than ever: their temper and frame of mind accorded so uniformly, that they never differed in the slightest and most immaterial particulars.

As the promotion he had lately met with, empowered him to remain at Paris, he now had uninterrupted opportunities of cultivating the society of his lovely acquaintance, and of improving his interest in her kind wishes.

But when two persons of different sexes contract uncommon intimacy, unless their passions are pre-engaged, or deprest by the weight of years, they seldom fail to exceed the limits of meer friendship.

This was precisely the case of the lady and gentleman in question. They were young, disengaged, and under no restrictions; they felt their mutual attachment encrease without the least strife to prevent it. They were conscious that love had taken possession of their bosoms: they reciprocally encouraged the flame; in short, they became passionately enamoured of each other.

They lived some years in the most perfect and happy union. Nothing was wanting to crown their utmost wishes, but the sanction of legality. They never, in all probability, had parted: but the gentleman, unfortunately, was promoted to so distinguished a rank, that it excited, or rather renewed the discontents of those over whom he had already obtained, as they complained,

complained, an undue preference. They at first murmured, and at last broke out in personal invectives against him, in which they glanced at the primitive authorefs of his good fortune. His spirit would not put up with these indignities; he resented them in the usual manner; and after escaping out of one duel, in which he was dangerously wounded, he unluckily fell in a second.

Such was the fatal end of her first lover: she long deplored his loss, as one who, though not her lawful husband, had been a true and kind companion, lovely in his manners and deportment, agreeable in his disposition, and endowed with every quality that could render a man respectable in the eyes of either sex.

After paying a due tribute of sorrow to his memory, and living a considerable time in total retirement from the world, she hearkened to the persuasions of her friends, and returned again to society.

Her connexion with her late friend, instead of doing her the least detriment, had shewn her in a variety of advantageous lights. Tho' united to him by illegal ties, she had been irreproachably diligent in discharging the duties of an affectionate wife; and what was much to her

honour, she had not consented to that connexion from lucrative views.

These considerations had raised her character very high in the opinion of her acquaintance: they knew how to discriminate between the pardonable weaknesses of an amiable character, and the criminal freedoms of an unjustifiable passion.

She was still in full possession of her charms. Her knowledge and experience of the world gave an additional splendour to all her other accomplishments; and she might now be said to have attained the meridian of both her exterior and internal perfections.

The adventures of a beautiful woman, while they only affect her person, without affording any just cause to reflect upon the goodness of her heart or understanding, confer a lustre upon her which enhances her value, and renders her more desirable than meer innocence, that has experienced no trials nor sufferings.

Thus the domestic calamities, which had been the fate of this lady, had proved her worth in a variety of instances: the tenderness and fidelity of her disposition, the generosity of her soul, had been manifested in the most conspicu-

ous

ous manner, and testified a most excellent and exalted character.

As these are the qualities which principally endear women to men, there was not a gentleman of her acquaintance, to whom she did not appear in the most captivating light.

Among the acquaintances of her deceased lover, there was one in whose company they both took peculiar delight. Exclusive of a fine understanding most richly cultivated, he was a man of rank, title, and considerable estate. He had been partly instrumental in the preferment of her friend, by his credit, with one of the principal members of the ministry.

He had lately lost his wife, a woman with whom, for various reasons, he had not lived upon agreeable terms. He had always shewn a particular regard to this lady, and omitted no opportunities of doing, for her sake, every service that his influence at court could effect in behalf of her friend.

He lamented his untimely end with a sincerity and unfeignedness, that deeply affected her. He undertook the settlement of his affairs after his death, at her request; and by his conduct and prudence secured a large

of money for her friend's sister, a very agreeable and deserving young gentlewoman, who was much in her good graces.

Having by these means constant opportunities of conversing with her, he could not resist the impulse he felt in her favour: he concealed it, until he thought he had, by every sort of attention and assiduity, convinced her of his devotion; losing no occasion, however, of giving her those intimations that women are not displeased with, and of preparing her to expect what, in due time, she might not perhaps be disinclined to approve.

At the expiration of a twelvemonth after the loss of her friend, this gentleman took the liberty of laying his sentiments before her in the most respectful terms. She did not refuse to listen to them; and only desired, that for the sake of decency, they might protract the date of their intended union to the further distance of another year. He acquiesced in her judgment; and after having jointly mourned their common friend twelve months longer, they yielded to their mutual inclination; and lived together under the same roof.

In the mean time, this new lover's friend at court began to lose ground. He had powerful

ful enemies; who though unequal to him in real abilities, were more conversant in artifice and intrigue. He knew the world well; but he despised it still more; his virtue was too rigid for his place. Informed of the machinations that were carried on against him, he scorned to counteract them; and finding that countenance given to them which his indisputable merit ought to have prevented, he resigned his post with the same indifference with which he had accepted it.

The lady's lover did not bear the disgrace of his friend so tamely: he loudly complained of the injustice done to a man of such eminence; and gave so unguarded a loose to his thoughts upon this occasion, that his familiars became apprehensive he had rather express himself too freely for his safety.

Their apprehensions were but too justly founded. A Letter de Cachet was issued against him; and he had hardly time to escape from those who were sent to arrest him.

So exasperated were the enemies of his late ministerial friend, that notwithstanding the most pressing solicitations of some very considerable personages, they continued to persecute him the space of more than three years; during which

which whole time his lovely mistress acted a part truly noble and heroic.

After providing for his concealment with equal resolution and sagacity, she shortly after repaired to him. They were both obliged to adopt a system of living very different from that wherein they had so long figured. Money they did not want; and the management of their affairs remained in hands they could fully trust. But they were compelled for safety to assume a fictitious character; and to withdraw to parts of the kingdom very remote from the place of their own residence. They were in continual danger of discovery; their persons were minutely described, and they were often obliged to shift their quarters, in order to elude the revengeful search of their persecutors.

Happily for these wandering and distressed lovers, the principal author of their calamity fell himself into disgrace: this brought about a mitigation, but not an end of their troubles. All that could be obtained through the intercession of powerful friends was, that the gentleman might return to his estate; but not presume to go from it above the distance of ten leagues.

To this rigorous injunction he was glad to submit, in order to return home, and enjoy with tranquillity

tranquillity and comfort the company of a woman, who had given him such very signal proofs of the most constant and unconquerable attachment.

About a year after their return, on the accession to a place in the ministry, of a person who highly favoured the lady's lover, the restraint was at last taken off: he was at the same time preferred to a place in his own province, of great distinction and emolument, and of which his eminent parts rendered him entirely worthy.

Here you see an example of disinterested friendship and sincere love, which cannot be exceeded by the brightest characters in the conjugal state. Doubtless this lady's situation, and that of the gentlemen with whom she connected herself, was so peculiar, that one cannot, in the strict sense of the term gallantry, class her with ladies of that appellation.

Her successive lovers were both single men: she herself was in the same condition; being forsaken by a man with whom his infamous conduct precluded her from living.

What I chiefly aimed at by this relation, was to confirm what I had asserted, of the partiality,

tiality, not uncommon among the French ladies, to men of superior abilities.

Before I close this letter, I will give you another specimen of the same kind, less rigid indeed than the last, but not less remarkable.

There lived not long ago in the Faubourg St. Germain, an elderly lady, who had in her youth been esteemed a beauty of the first rate: she was nobly born and had been excellently educated; but having only a slender fortune, she married a Financier. His wealth was so great, as to subject him to that examination of his accounts, which the French emphatically call a *chambre ardente*, and which we may translate by a fiery trial.

Whether he proved himself innocent of the accusations laid to his charge, or whether he purchased an absolution, as generally happens in such cases, he came successfully out of this pass, and was permitted to retain what he had acquired.

He was very disproportionably older than this lady; who accepted of him at the persuasion of friends, and by no means from her own desire. Money was the only qualification he possessed. Being of a fullen disposition, narrow-minded, needlessly

needlessly parsimonious, and though fond of ostentation, yet redeeming the extraordinary expence of one day by the abstinence and niggardliness of many.

Such was the partner to whom her friends thought proper she should become a temporary sacrifice. Being forty years older than his bride, she had every reason to promise herself a sufficient space of future indulgence, for the disagreeable time she might spend in his company. But his conduct exhausted her patience, before death put an end to the odious contract she had been over-persuaded to sign.

At the epocha of her marriage, she was precisely twenty, and her husband sixty. Had age only intervened between them, it is thought they might have lived on tolerable terms; but she was, on the one hand, all vivacity; he, on the other, all heaviness. Her mind was stored with plays, romances, novels, epigrams, madrigals, sonnets, stanzas, in short, with every produce that flourishes in the soil of Parnassus. Her imagination was incessantly on the wing, and her pen perpetually in her hand, to usher out the productions of her fertile brain; and nothing gave her so much delight as the conversation of individuals similarly inclined.

Had

Had her husband shewn indulgence to her pursuits, he might not improbably have secured her good will and behaviour, if not her affections; but he studied, as it were, to alienate from him a young woman, who, though volatile, had an uncommon share of sense and wit, and very far from a bad heart.

But he was unworthy of her in every light: having received no more than a counting-house education, he was insensible of her intellectual merit; and most of the subjects of her discourse were to him absolutely unintelligible.

Being completely illiterate himself, he hated the society of persons of literature; and would often express the utmost contempt for every kind of knowledge, that was not conducive to the attainment of wealth.

In this indeed he was only one among many; as it is but too customary for men of limited education, great industry, and little minds, to undervalue talents, of the magnitude and utility of which they have no conception.

Instead of humouring his wife in these innocent freaks, he morosely reprehended her, and gave her to understand, that he expected she should bid adieu to these levities of her childhood,

hood, as he called them, and set her mind on more serious objects.

He began by stinting her in the number and choice of her companions. Those young ladies, who by their sportive behaviour contributed to make her situation sit easy, he insisted on her discarding, as being too noisy and troublesome in a well regulated family.

He next abridged her of the liberty of repairing to a weekly Coterie of ladies. This he termed an academy of contrivances, how to fool husbands out of their money and authority.

He would willingly have restrained her from plays and concerts; but she expressed herself so warmly against a retrenchment of this nature, that he was fain to leave her in possession of these two favourite pastimes; in the last of which she not only took much delight, but occasionally made no inconsiderable figure; being a most excellent proficient at the harpsichord, and possessing a very fine voice.

His covetousness prompted him next to curtail the frequency of the assemblies and musical parties held at his house, and to draw the expences attending suppers and card tables into a narrower compass.

In

In all these alterations, though they were much against her will, he found her more passive and acquiescent than he had a right to expect. Had he proceeded no further, she might have tolerated the restrictions he laid upon her, and the native cheerfulness of her mind would have supplied deficiencies.

But as if he had pre-determined to try the extent of her forbearance, he conceived the idea of carrying his system of reformation into her library. Against this, it seems, he had conceived an invincible prepossession; looking upon it to contain the seeds of that striking contrariety which subsisted in their respective dispositions.

Full of this conceit, he resolved at once to eradicate them: to this purpose he took the opportunity of her absence on a visit, to rummage her library from top to bottom. Every novel and romance that fell into his hands, he considered as so many domestic enemies. He seized and confined them accordingly under his own lock and key: he dealt no less severely with sundry play-books, and collections of songs and epigrams; in short, he despoiled her of two thirds of her literary furniture.

Returning home, the first visit as usual was to her library; but what was her astonishment

to miss at once so many of her books, and to learn by whom they had been taken away!

She flew to her husband's apartment, and insisted on his returning them immediately; but he coolly told her, they were the cause of much mischief between them: that had he seized on more, he should have done rightly; and that he had left her a greater number than she needed, for their mutual good.

She used a variety of expostulations to recover, if not all, at least a part of what was taken from her; but no arguments prevailed: he continued inexorable; and she left him filled with indignation at such harsh and undeserved usage.

Her books were her favourite property: they were her best friends and comforters against the austerity of her husband's conduct and manners: the deprivation of them was like a separation from persons, with whom we have always lived in habits of the closest intimacy.

This treatment of a handsome and sprightly young woman, who had hitherto behaved with all reasonable submission, and had given no just cause of offence, alarmed her friends, and was not approved by his own.

Y

It

It was represented to him, that to debar so lively a young lady from such harmless and cheap gratifications, was the ready way to set her invention at work, for the procuring of others, with which possibly he would be much more displeased: that she had, notwithstanding the disparity of years between them, acted with so much discretion, wherever he was concerned, that instead of severity, she merited all kind of indulgence.

But his inflexibility was proof against all admonition: he persisted in this moroseness of behaviour, and rather added to than detracted from it.

The consequences were what every body had foreboded: his young wife lost all regard for him; and though she took care to do nothing to exasperate him, she became careless and remiss in her endeavours to please him.

Indifference and dislike for those, to whom we are legally bound, soon opens a door to predilection for others; especially when comparisons are not favourable to the former.

Her husband had a young relation, who frequently visited him, not so much from motives of attachment as of interest. He was a very sensible young gentleman, and quite such a character

rafter as accorded with the ideas of the Financier's wife. He was skilled in music, and had a very pleasing voice; but what chiefly made him acceptable, was his wit, liveliness, and literary accomplishments.

In these he had made a proficiency far beyond his years: he had been originally designed for the church; but he soon displayed a disposition not in the least calculated for such a vocation; and his friends had left him at liberty to make another option. What he now chiefly aimed at, was to obtain some lucrative employment through means of his relation the Financier.

With this young gentleman the Financier's lady gradually contracted a friendship, that soon ripened into a close intimacy: he became the confidant of her discontents; she wholly unbosomed herself in his company; and he was the depositary of all her secrets.

Her person was so beautiful, her discourse so sensible, and her manners so winning, that she quickly captivated his heart: he coincided with all her notions, bewailed her hard treatment, and condemned his relation in terms of the keenest anger.

In this manner they continued awhile; every day affording fresh causes of complaint from

the lady to her confident, and additional motives to be delighted with him, for the sympathy he always expressed upon those occasions.

Her aversion to her husband grew at last so powerful, that she conceived the design of retiring into a convent. She disclosed it to her friend; but he dissuaded her from it with all the warmth and eloquence of a man invincibly attached to her welfare; he convinced her that whatever mortifications she might undergo from the oppressive temper of a husband, it was preferable to the confinement and slavery of a conventual life.

He added, that if she was determined to quit him, her friends must prove the best protectors; but that if she mistrusted them, and was still resolved to abandon him, sooner than she should be obliged to endure the reproofs and harsh usage, which she must unavoidably experience on taking such a step, he would dedicate all he was worth in the world to her support. His income indeed did not go beyond mediocrity; but still was sufficient to maintain her.

He concluded, however, by advising her to bear with as much dissimulation as she was able, the unworthy behaviour of her husband; and to wait with patience, till a change in his disposition,

disposition, or more favourable circumstances operated for her interest.

She took his advice, and relinquished the project of forsaking her husband; but the warmth and ardour with which her young friend had espoused her cause, kindled in her bosom the most violent flame of reciprocal love. As they were familiarly together, it increased very rapidly to a vehement degree, and at last became ungovernable.

They lived together in this concealed union a few years; when the demise of an uncle, to whom her friend was heir, obliged him to quit her, in order to settle the affairs of the estate, of which he was now become possessor.

A great part of that estate was in litigation. The parties, who were his near relations, were very desirous of terminating matters amicably. To this purpose an interview was proposed, to which he acceded. Among other proposals, they offered to relinquish all their claims, on condition of his marrying their daughter, who was a very agreeable young lady. So advantageous an offer he was too wise to refuse.

In the mean while, the Financier's lady, who had lately received no tidings from him, began

to apprehend for his safety. The person through whose hands their correspondence was transmitted, brought her at last a letter, in which her lover explained himself sufficiently, to let her see that his absence would be of a long duration. He did not chuse to precipitate a discovery of the whole truth, knowing the violence of her passion for him.

After deferring matters as long as he could, he was at last under the necessity of acquainting her with what must of itself shortly come to her knowledge. He did it in terms equally affectionate and discreet; and assigned such reasons for his conduct, as to a woman of her good sense could not fail of proving satisfactory.

But however he might justify himself to her mind, he could not so easily cure her heart; he had been the stay and comfort of the wretched life she led; he was now lost for ever; and she remained without any one with whom to share the sense of her afflictions.

Her husband gave no signs of alteration; years added to his moroseness; and he grew so churlish and ill tempered, that many of his acquaintance dropped him by degrees.

He

He was at this time involved in a law suit. A gentleman of eminence in the profession was frequently at his house; he was a person of great eloquence, and made a very distinguished figure at the bar.

As his conversation was lively and pleasing, he often, in the course of business, spent an evening at the Financier's, who placed unbounded reliance on his skill.

In a short time he obtained a familiar footing in the family; this led him to perceive the disunion subsisting between the Financier and his wife: she was so lovely, that had she been in fault, no man could have sided against her; but she had so many evident motives for disliking her husband, that nobody could know her situation without feeling for her.

She soon interested the lawyer in her behalf; and he quickly succeeded her former friend in the confidential post he had occupied at first.

The situation of this gentleman was peculiar. He was married, but had some time been parted from his wife; whose jealous temper and fiery spirit, rendered her totally insupportable.

Though not handsome, he was extremely pleasing in his deportment, of a gay and facetious disposition, and of a placid and even temper.

The company of this gentleman administered some relief to the lady. Confidence became reciprocal; and he described his own domestic vexations in a stile, that made her sensible he was as unhappy in a wife as she was in a husband.

As a similitude of grievances naturally begets mutual feelings, the two complainants conceived a solicitude for each other's concerns, that ended at last in the warmest tenderness for each other's persons.

They continued making the usual progress in such cases; and at length yielded to the passion they entertained for each other.

In the mean time, the law suit was carried on with proper care and spiritedness: the lawyer, as if to make every kind of amends to the Financier, exerted all his powers in maintaining his cause. He did it so effectually, that it was won in the compleatest manner.

The Financier, on this occasion, would have rewarded his advocate with a generosity which he

he had never before felt himself inclined to exercise; but that gentleman declined his client's offers; and assuring him that he had acted from motives of friendship, could never be prevailed upon to accept of any recompence.

He had too much honour and compunction to require any gratification from a man, whom his conscience reproached him for treating with so much illicit freedom.

The tyrannical behaviour of the Financier, seemed on the other hand to justify the conduct of his wife; who by this time had argued herself into perfect ease at the system of life she was pursuing. She was become perfectly callous with respect to her husband, to whom she considered herself as having been basely devoted for the gratification of the vanity and avarice of her parents; and did not deem herself bound to him any farther than her interest was concerned.

Time at length put an end to her matrimonial thralldom: her husband going into the country to view a purchase he had lately made, took so much unnecessary fatigue, as threw him into a fever; which through neglect became fatal, and carried him off, to the great satisfaction of a woman, whom he had never thought it worth his while, to study in any shape how to please.

As

Though not handsome, he was extremely pleasing in his deportment, of a gay and facetious disposition, and of a placid and even temper.

The company of this gentleman administered some relief to the lady. Confidence became reciprocal; and he described his own domestic vexations in a stile, that made her sensible he was as unhappy in a wife as she was in a husband.

As a similitude of grievances naturally begets mutual feelings, the two complainants conceived a solicitude for each other's concerns, that ended at last in the warmest tenderness for each other's persons.

They continued making the usual progress in such cases; and at length yielded to the passion they entertained for each other.

In the mean time, the law suit was carried on with proper care and spiritedness: the lawyer, as if to make every kind of amends to the Financier, exerted all his powers in maintaining his cause. He did it so effectually, that it was won in the compleatest manner.

The Financier, on this occasion, would have rewarded his advocate with a generosity which he

he had never before felt himself inclined to exercise; but that gentleman declined his client's offers; and assuring him that he had acted from motives of friendship, could never be prevailed upon to accept of any recompence.

He had too much honour and compunction to require any gratification from a man, whom his conscience reproached him for treating with so much illicit freedom.

The tyrannical behaviour of the Financier, seemed on the other hand to justify the conduct of his wife; who by this time had argued herself into perfect ease at the system of life she was pursuing. She was become perfectly callous with respect to her husband, to whom she considered herself as having been basely devoted for the gratification of the vanity and avarice of her parents; and did not deem herself bound to him any farther than her interest was concerned.

Time at length put an end to her matrimonial thralldom: her husband going into the country to view a purchase he had lately made, took so much unnecessary fatigue, as threw him into a fever; which through neglect became fatal, and carried him off, to the great satisfaction of a woman, whom he had never thought it worth his while, to study in any shape how to please.

As

As a very ample dowry had been settled upon her by the marriage contract, she became uncontrouled mistress of an affluent income.

She could now indulge without apprehension or restraint, the affection she profest for her lawyer; they accordingly united into one family, and lived together as man and wife.

But this gentleman's own spouse, who, tho' jealous and violent in her temper, was irreproachable in her morals, began to open her eyes on the impropriety of her conduct, and to be desirous of a reconciliation with her husband.

Previous to his connexion with the Financier's lady, he had given his wife no reasonable cause to suspect him of wanting affection for her. She was now convinced, upon cool reflexion, that she alone was blameable for his present conduct. The consequence was, that she expressed a willingness to make him every atonement in her power, provided he would forgive what was past, and return to her.

As jealousy is rather a disagreeable proof of love, than any justifiable motive of aversion, the lawyer's heart was moved, on receiving these intimations from a person, whom he had once sincerely loved, and had never hated. He
could

could not help feeling a revival of his former partiality for a wife who having offended him through mistake, acknowledged her error with contrition, and implored his forgiveness.

Independent of these motives, she was a handsome woman, very sensible and discreet in every other part of her conduct, and highly respected by all her acquaintance.

Her friends on this occasion employed their good offices to such effect, that after some hesitation, he consented to see her at a relation's house: here she exprest so much penitence for her fault, so much affection for his person, and used, in short, so many endearments, as totally overcame him. He took her to his bosom, and they were entirely reconciled.

During these transactions, the Financier's widow was in the country on a visit; he apprized her by letter of what had happened, and took his final leave of her with no less delicacy of sentiments, than solidity of reasoning on the necessity of their separation.

Her relations were now very urgent with her to connect herself honourably with some person, on whom she could bestow both her heart and her hand.

She

She was not herself disinclined to such an union; but when she recollected the felicity she had enjoyed with her two lovers, and the misery she had suffered with her husband, she could not prevail upon herself to venture upon a second.

After long consulting with herself, she thought the wisest course was to remain her own mistress; and if it was her fate to meet with a man whom she could not avoid loving, still to make love alone the tie of their union.

At the time she took this resolution she was about thirty; a period of life when judgment and experience, in people of sense, enable them to form a proper estimate of things.

She now launched into all the gaieties that her plentiful income afforded; and seemed resolved to indemnify herself for the captivity of body and mind wherein her husband had so injuriously detained her.

Still however she preserved a character of elegance that marked her disposition, and accompanied all her amusements; she frequented none but persons of wit and genius; these alone she courted, and to such only her house gave admission.

Among

Among the gay young gentlemen of her acquaintance was one on whom she did not long refrain from conferring her predilection. He too, like the last object of her favour, was of eminence in the law. He was full of vivacity and good humour, a complete master of all kind of polite literature, and had given several specimens of first rate abilities in more than one branch of erudition.

Such a man was like a prize in a lottery to a woman of her frame: she soon singled him out from the croud of her admirers; and he as soon perceived that he was the happy individual, for whom she destined the present of her heart.

She was a woman of such enchanting manners, that her endeavours to make a conquest were always irresistible. This young gentleman soon became a captive to her charms: she inspired him with so ardent a passion, that he implored her to honour him with her hand; but she trembled at such a request; and assured him, that while his attachment was sincere, he needed not to apprehend that her own would prove less fervent, let the duration of his prove ever so long.

No woman could have performed her engagement with more punctuality. She remained

ed his faithful irreproachable companion during six years ; giving him every proof of attachment and generosity, that the fondest husband could expect from the most grateful and affectionate wife.

At the expiration of this period, his mother, who, notwithstanding the impropriety of the connexion, could not but admire the character of his mistress, insisted on his parting from her, under pain of forfeiting her maternal kindness, and of losing whatever it was in her power to leave him, which was very considerable.

This dreadful sentence he strove all he could to deprecate : he succeeded so far, as to obtain her consent he should marry the lady, were she willing ; but here he was as unsuccessful as he had been before : she told him, that as she gave up every thing for him, he ought to do as much for her ; that all she had should become his property at her demise ; he knew she had a splendid fortune ; what could he desire more ?

This answer, though satisfactory to him, did not appear so to his mother ; she repeated her solicitations and her threats ; but both would have been unavailing, had not another argument been used.

He

He had an only sister, a remarkably modest and pious young lady; she was married to a president in one of the courts of parliament. Her husband's sister had lately lost her spouse, a gentleman of immense fortune; which, a few legacies excepted, he had wholly bequeathed to her.

This lady had taken much notice of him on sundry occasions; lamenting that a gentleman of such flattering expectations, should lose himself in such a manner. His sister seized this opportunity of putting her own suspicions to the test: she desired her candidly to acknowledge, whether, in case he paid his addresses to her, he stood a chance of being favoured with her countenance.

The lady, thus closely pressed by one for whom she professed the highest regard, and in whom she could repose all confidence, hesitated not in confessing that her brother was not indifferent to her; and that she would feel no repugnance in admitting him as a suitor, provided he could be reclaimed from his present situation.

His sister lost no time in acquainting his mother with this favourable declaration: it was agreed that on his next visit to the family, a concert should be given; at which this young
widow

widow should appear in the most superb and splendid manners.

The occasion soon offered : exclusive of the riches in the possession of this lady, her personal charms were not inferior to those of the Financier's widow; and she was full ten years younger.

She appeared to an advantage that struck the whole company. The young gentleman, in particular, who had not seen her since her widowhood, was equally surprised and taken with the gracefulness and dignity of her deportment. He told his sister, that though he had often heard how much she was improved, yet she far surpassed his expectations; and that if her inside corresponded with her appearance, she was the most lovely woman he had ever beheld.

Such an avowal was highly pleasing to his sister. She reported it to the young widow; whom it flattered still more, as being personally interested. They agreed, that while he remained with his mother, she should make one of the family.

The daily sight of so enchanting a figure, the agreeableness of her conversation and manners, the importunities of his mother and sister, the solicitations of some respectable friends, all conspired

conspired to shake his former determinations; and to make him reflect on the more creditable situation of being the husband of so beautiful, so accomplished, and so wealthy a bride, than of remaining the gallant of a lady, whom, however amiable and deserving, he could not strictly consider as his own.

All these reflexions operated powerfully: still however the long union with his mistress had no less weight. Her beauty, her sensibility, her attachment, her generosity, were considerations, on the other hand, of equal efficacy.

His mind thus suspended between two objects equally enchanting, and his inclinations wavering on which of the two they should finally settle, he became the prey of such anxiety and agitation, as threw him into a violent fit of illness. It lasted a considerable time, and he was once almost despaired of.

On this occasion he was so closely beset by the pious part of his family and relations, that he acquiesced at last in their incessant intreaties to give up his mistress. So fearful were they of a relapse, that they insisted he should charge a friend with the commission of carrying his parting message.

Z

After

After delivering him from his fetters, it was thought necessary for the complete cure of his mind and body, to remove him to a country house belonging to his brother-in-law. Here he tarried a whole summer; and what with rural amusements, what with the sollicitous kindness of his friends, and their continual endeavours to make his time pass agreeably, he recovered his health and spirits; and betrayed no further symptoms of his former unhappy passion.

What chiefly furthered his recovery, was the presence of that object which had partly occasioned his illness. The struggles he underwent, before he could be induced to forsake his prior flame, enhanced the value of the victory she had obtained over her rival. She viewed him as one, who had nearly lost his life in the contest he had submitted to for her sake.

He viewed her, on the other hand, as one who had offered herself as the prize and reward of his fortitude in overcoming an improper attachment; in this light she appeared to him as the guardian angel of his happiness.

Having rescued him from a situation which his friends had so long deplored, she conferred an additional felicity on both, by admitting

ting of his addressee, and honouring him with the acceptance of his hand,

In the mean time, his forsaken friend had been circumstantially informed of all that had passed: she knew with what reluctance he had consented to leave her, and what a price it had like to have cost him. She now felt his value more than ever; and almost repented the not having secured him to herself for life, in the manner he had so often proposed.

But as grief is unavailing in cases past remedy, she saw how requisite it was for the peace of her mind, to banish him from her recollection. She accordingly summoned all her fortitude; and in order to effect a radical cure, she resolved to quit Paris; where possibly her eyes might either meet with his person, or with too many objects to remind her of him.

She went to a considerable distance, at the request of one of her most trusty female intimates; one who, like herself, had experienced some adventures, and was pretty much of the same age and disposition.

In the society of this lady she remained more than a twelvemonth: they passed their time

chiefly in reading and writing, and in relating to each other the various passages of their respective lives.

As they were both very entertaining persons, a gentleman in the neighbourhood, a relation to the latter of these ladies, was always very desirous of having them at his house; and often made parties on their account.

In one of these the colonel of a regiment in the neighbourhood happened to be present: he was a well-looking man, equally sensible and well bred; his knowledge of the world was accompanied with an extraordinary fund of polite erudition.

He had spent a great part of his life abroad, in the service of powers in alliance or amity with France; and having always been a man of deep and perpetual observation, he had collected a great deal of useful and pleasurable information. Being at the same time of a cheerful temper, and a friend to all manner of gaiety; he was the soul of company, and equally a favourite among the gentlemen and the ladies.

Such was the person who excited her particular notice for the first time since she had lost her last admirer. As he was a man of gallantry,
and

and very quick and keen in his perceptions, he was not long in discovering that he was an object of her attention. It flattered him exceedingly; and he returned her notice in a manner that shewed how kindly he felt it, and how ready she would find him to answer her predilection.

They soon formed an acquaintance that became very agreeable to both parties. It ripened by degrees into an intimacy, that afforded him frequent opportunities of seeing her in a very advantageous light.

He had at first proposed to himself no more than the transient pleasure he had so often tasted in the course of his gallantries; but he now discovered such attractions in this lady, as quite subdued the rovingness of his temper; he felt a serious passion, he frankly avowed it, and offered himself to her upon honourable terms.

She acted upon this occasion with an ingenuousness and a dignity that added to the attachment and respect which he had conceived for her. She made an explicit acknowledgement of the frailties and errors of her past life; and concluded by letting him know, that notwithstanding the resolution she had taken to remain mistress of her person, she would for his sake re-

call it, if after what he had heard, he persisted in the sentiments he had expressed,

The colonel was a man who perfectly understood human nature. He fully saw that in all her deviations from the strictness of virtue, she had been led astray by a fatal concatenation of circumstances ; and that her heart still remained untouched, and was fraught with every noble and delicate sentiment, that could render a man of sense perfectly happy.

He acknowledged without hesitation that such were his thoughts ; and that instead of receding from his proffers, he held her in greater admiration, and felt her dearer to him, from the candour and liberality of her dealing.

After this reciprocal confession, nothing remained but to settle matters preparatory to their union : the colonel, who had a soul as generous as her own, was above profiting through her fortune. Having a plentiful sufficiency of his own, he left her the entire disposal of all she had. Content, as he affectionately told her, with the sole possession of such a treasure as herself.

They were shortly after married. She was then in her thirty-eighth, and the colonel in his fiftieth year : they lived together a long time in the
the

the most uninterrupted enjoyment of conjugal felicity ; and upon his demise, which happened a little while ago, he left her a noble addition to the income she already possessed.

From these anecdotes, we should learn to form no precipitate judgments of such women as depart from a strict line of regularity ; especially when the objects of their attachment are otherwise persons of unblemished character.

A legal union cannot too much be prized above all others ; and consequently cannot be too strongly encouraged and enforced ; but while we pay that homage to this sacred tie, which it has a right to exact, let not our zeal for virtue degenerate into an illiberal outrageousness against human weakness. Let us remember that of all frailties, none is so deserving of compassion, as that which originates from the misfortune of having too much softness and pliancy of heart. It is principally womankind that falls under this calamity ; and it ill becomes the men, who are so prone to avail themselves of this disposition, to upbraid women with too much readiness to yield to their ungenerous solicitations.

These anecdotes also teach us, that the gallantry of the French ladies, is occasionally attended with circumstances that greatly alleviate

it; and that are even productive of instances of honour, magnanimity, and other virtues, which perhaps would have lain dormant, had they not been brought forth by accidents and adventures of this nature.

This very predilection for men of merit, so frequent among them, is itself, though not a justification, yet a motive to treat their foibles with much more lenity and mildness of censure, than if they were sordid and unprincipled in their choice of objects. It shews they have a sense of delicacy, even when under the influence of vicious habits.

This partiality does not terminate with women of the characters I have been describing: it is often found in those licentious females in genteel life, whose attachments are slight and transitory; and whom we have the fullest right to consider as the very soul and support of what is really meant by gallantry.

L E T-

LETTER XVII.

Principal Causes of the Credit and Authority exercised by the French Women—the Opinion they entertain of themselves, and of the Women of other Countries—Conclusion.

FROM the various observations contained in the foregoing letters, I apprehend you must necessarily infer, that the French are more than any other people, subject and subservient to the government and controul of their women.

It appears, that notwithstanding the levity and frivolousness of disposition ascribed to the French women, they possess an acuteness of perception, and a dexterity of management, that give them an invincible ascendancy over the men. This is the more striking and remarkable, as these not only feel it most sensibly, but complain of it in the most bitter and indignant terms, and yet submit to it universally, as it were, by tacit consent.

In

In the majority, however, this submission is not accompanied with murmur and repugnance. It seems to flow from the opinion they have of the prudence and circumspectfulness of the other sex.

The fact is, that this influence is not owing merely to the fondness of the men for the women, on account of the charms and pleasures arising from the diversity of sex. It is, in a considerable measure, due to the variety of knowledge and experience of the women in all kind of affairs.

They are, from their infancy, trained up in a perpetual insight of all that passes in and out of their families, and have a constant share, not only in domestic transactions, but in all occurrences relating directly or indirectly to the concerns or interest of their household,

Thus they acquire an experimental capacity for business, that renders them betimes the associates of the men in their several employments and professions; and that enables them to assume a character in which they chiefly pride themselves, that of agents and superintendants in all such matters.

I knew

I knew a French gentleman of great abilities, who had seen much of the world, and who in the course of a variegated life, had met with a multiplicity of means to acquire uncommon information. He used frequently to say, and he spoke from experience, that throughout the numerous acquaintances he had formed among both sexes, in the run of many years, he had invariably found the women as discerning and judicious at least as the men, in their general opinions of things; and that he would as soon consult some women he could mention, in cases of the highest importance, as any men he knew of.

It may therefore be said, that if the French allow so much preponderance to the sex, it is not altogether without some reason; since they take so much pains to qualify themselves for the deference that is shewn to their ideas and inclinations;

This propensity in the men to listen to their desires, is not then to be treated as a matter of jocoseness; as it clearly proceeds from no ill-founded a persuasion, that their advice is not to be undervalued; and that a co-operation of their intellectual powers is of real and essential utility.

The

The women seem, on the other hand, convinced that this is no more than a just and proper idea of the character they ought to bear. They are consequently very resolute in maintaining the prerogative which they deem annexed to it, that of enjoying a participation in the designs formed by the men, and of being allowed to give their own suffrages previously to any determination.

Were the men to presume to exclude them from their consultations, they would resent such treatment by throwing every embarrassment in the way of what was projected. This being well known to the men, they are too wise to raise commotions that would serve no other purpose than to disturb domestic tranquillity. They admit of the joint authority of their fair partners, who may, according to this system, be represented as the co-efficient members of a conubial confederacy, no less than as the lawful claimers of the persons and affections of their husbands.

Thus in France, perhaps more than in any other country, the union of the sexes is an alliance framed upon the fairest footing of equality on both sides.

The

The French women are not a little elated with the privileges, which they challenge and exercise in the matrimonial state. They imagine that no women of any nation can boast of the same degree of liberty in that situation; and that in the compacts, which nature has made necessary between man and woman, they have incomparably beyond those of any country, found means, in the donation of their persons, to retain and preserve unviolated the rights belonging to their sex.

This is a topic on which the women of wit and education in France descant with much copiousness and pleasantry. They are apt on this occasion, to launch out in a profusion of jests on the usage and treatment of the women in other parts.

In order to ascertain the superiority of their own condition, they enumerate the mortifying circumstances attending matrimony among their female neighbours; and draw such pictures as are equally descriptive of their grievances, and favourable to their own pretensions.

In Germany they will not allow to be the seat of sufficient politeness, to form civil and complaisant husbands. Immersed in roughness of manners, their minds are too unpolished to admit of that delicacy

delicacy of thinking, which produces an intimacy of soul between the sexes: the consequence is, that the weight of authority is felt in the most oppressive manner; and that every unmanly advantage is taken to depress and keep women in a state of legal servitude. From this unworthy situation hardly any other females are exempted, but such as are in the genteeler spheres of life; and whom an imitation of French manners, happily adopted by the better sort, prevents from sharing in the general calamity.

In Italy, till of late years, the fair sex met with still harsher usage than in Germany. The narrow hearts and mean suspicions of the men, transformed them into jailors instead of husbands. They viewed their wives as beings merely calculated for the purposes of pleasurable intercourse. They set no value upon their minds, and held them unfit to be trusted. Conscious of their own depravity of taste, they judged of women as of themselves; they looked upon them as equally prone to licentiousness, and were convinced that too many precautions could not be taken, to secure a fidelity that did not exist in their hearts. In such a situation, what were women but prisoners at sight?

The

The description given of the treatment of the fair sex in Spain, is not in the least more favourable. Here the spirit of jealousy reigned in all its horrors : women on the one hand were adored, on the other were enslaved. Husbands tyrannised by excess of love, became in turn the tyrants of their wives. Not content with that attachment of soul and person with which reason ought to be satisfied, they envied the world the very sight of those charms, of which they had the sole possession ; and absurdly thought, that a woman had no title to enjoy the benefit of any society but their own. What could result from such conduct in the men, but hatred and contempt of them in the women, and a settled determination to infidelity, whenever occasions offered ?

Such was Spain, they tell you, till consanguinity of sovereigns opened a way for more propitious alterations. France may be thanked for those changes that since then have been gradually taking place, and mitigated the slavery of the fair.

England comes next under consideration. As the mildness and humanity of the English, is in nothing more conspicuous than in their behaviour to womankind. It is not for want of kindness to their wives, the French women find any fault

fault with English husbands; it is for quite another reason: they tax them with that diffidence in the sex, which absolves a woman of all trouble and concern in weighty matters, from an apprehension that they may either interfere with her good humour, or take her off from the inspection and management of other family business. In consequence of this notion, the women are denied that proportion of influence in essentials, which only can place them on a footing of partnership and equality; without which, though they may participate in all the splendour and prosperity of men's circumstances, yet they cannot be esteemed their associates and confidants, the only titles by which a woman can truly be mistress of her husband's heart.

Thus you see how industriously the French women labour to represent the condition of the married fair in other countries, as inferior to their own in the most flattering points of view.

The description is highly coloured, and quite in that stile of excess and amplification, in which they delight to indulge their volatile fancies, much quicker at catching those ideas that may please a heated and careless imagination, than such as are able to satisfy a cool and steady judgment.

After

After depicting in this manner the matrimonial situation of women abroad, let us now advert to the account they give of their own.

As much as they think ill usage and impropriety exercised in foreign parts, so much they imagine that a just treatment and a rectitude of behaviour in the men in regard to them, is their more fortunate portion.

Conformably to this idea, they largely expatiate on the satisfaction and comfort they experience in the married state. No fetters, no restraints are laid upon them. Their persons and proceedings are equally free; no suspicions, no jealousies attend them abroad; and they live at home in the uninterrupted enjoyment of the generous liberty of acting as they please.

Mean time, they have a full access to the knowledge of all transactions, whether of a domestic nature, or in the way of their husband's occupations. There are no secrets for them; whatever is done receives their previous sanction. Hence, say they, peace and unity must necessarily proceed; as none of those disagreeable after-reckonings can take place, that so often breed discord between man and wife,

A a

when

when unlucky projects have been adopted without her concurrence.

Thus they are truly wives; that is to say, sharers and coadjutors in all the actions of their husbands. This is the surest tie for good conduct and mutual regard on both sides. It secures them both, through the impossibility of being deficient in prudence, or wanting in attachment, without an immediate discovery of the offending party.

This it must be acknowledged is a very agreeable theory; how far it may answer in practice would furnish matter for an ample discussion. Suffice it here, that I have laid before you the sentiments of French ladies on the treatment of married women in their own and in other countries; leaving it with you to consider, whether there is more of fancifulness than veracity in their allegations; or whether, notwithstanding the wanderings of a playful imagination, they do not in some respects approach very near the truth.

I will now conclude these remarks on the French ladies, by observing, that no women exhibit a stronger contrast of opposite and contradictory qualities. One would think that nature had designed them as proofs of her impartial dealing with mankind, by the scrupulous
care

care she has taken to counterpoize their various defects with no less a diversity of useful endowments.

While we are charmed with their sprightliness, we are no less disgusted with their levity; and yet, strange to tell, in the midst of that dissipatedness of mind which it occasions, they are able instantly to recollect themselves, and recall their scattered thoughts for the sudden decision of the most grave and serious affairs.

One would imagine from the general tenor of their discourse, that nothing but frivolousness occupied their attention; when the real truth is, that they are often at the very moment of this trifling, taken up with the plan or prosecution of some design, no less deeply laid than artfully executed.

They cannot, it seems, divest themselves of an appearance of gaiety either in the contriving or the performance of what they have projected. They put one in mind of those countenances whose features wear a perpetual smile, not arising from internal serenity, but imprinted on them by the hand of nature, and ineffacable by hardships and calamity.

A a z

This

This air of gaiety, while it renders their exterior pleasing, is far from inimical to inward composure. Though seemingly full of play, they are actually full of thought; and they are extremely deceived, who imagine them light and airy at all times because they appear so at most.

True it is they seldom affect reserve; and such as know them little, are not apt to be prepossessed in favour of their discretion; but people of penetration will not give them less credit for neglecting the semblance, while they are not deficient in the reality. The prudence of the French women is like their persons, often in a dishabille; but, like them too, is not less intent nor successful in compassing its end, in spite of its unpromising appearance.

Thus one may truly define them, a mixture of levity and circumspection; the weight is so equal in each of the scales, that if accidentally the one should decline a moment from its due level, it immediately recovers its proper poize, through the exact proportion of gravity inherent in both.

Their fondness for pleasure is no less marked by a peculiar admixture of restraint, resulting from conscientious motives: Even the most devoted to the gratification of their wishes, will practice at times the most severe abstinence.

From

From revelling without limitation in the wilds of diversions and joys of every kind, they will scrupulously confine themselves to exercises of piety; and from ranging at large in vicious courses, they will occasionally submit to the strictest austerities of a penitential life.

This you must allow, is blending two things the most repugnant in nature, devotion and licentiousness; it is however a compound of very common fabrication; it shews more than any thing else the inconsistency of the human mind, and of what discordant principles it is constructed. But it has its use; it moderates the impetuosity of passions, that might otherwise prove ungovernable; and prevents individuals engaged in habitual vices, from running those lengths to which that fatal addiction would lead them infallibly, were they not arrested in their career by these seasonable interruptions.

In this manner, it is, the French ladies find means to make, as it were, a composition between their virtues and their vices; and to quiet those qualms within, that would disturb their tranquillity, were it not secured by these temporary sacrifices of the vanities and wicked ways of this world at the altar of religion.

This

This contrast between their good and bad qualities, may be traced in the minutest, as well as in the principal features of their character.

It is strikingly visible in matters of importance. Thus we see voluptuousness go hand in hand with devotion; discretion with levity; cheerfulness with improper familiarity; and ease of manners with too much freedom.

In occurrences of lesser moment, it is equally perceptible: they are apt to affect elegance, and to forget neatness; they are expensive in some articles of apparel and furniture, and niggardly in others; they take extraordinary pains in decorating their persons, and yet are liable to be neglectful in the article of domestic cleanliness.

On this contrast, it seems, is chiefly founded the imputation of their inconstant disposition. As they are perpetually varying from one extreme to another, we thereby are induced to accuse them of being prone to change; but we should recollect it is only the metamorphosis of the day; which, like a dress worn by rotation, is put off and reassumed according to the caprice which predominates.

The

The mutability complained of in the French women, is in most things rather a successive return of the same habits and fancies, that follow each other alternatively at different times. It is not that revolution in the soul and mind which is produced by a novelty of passions; such internal storms seldom arise but from a change of objects in the other sex.

We may now take our final leave of the French ladies, by observing that notwithstanding the defects that have been so freely mentioned, the balance of comparison between these and their many amiable qualifications, greatly preponderates in their favour.

Take them all in all, there are no women more calculated to render society happy; they possess every chief requisite for that purpose in the most eminent degree. Lively, chearful, witty, facetious, their disposition fits them naturally for company; the communicativeness of their temper, and the engagingness of their behaviour, beget reciprocal harmony, and circulate a spirit of pleasure that is the principal delight and merit of conversation.

Qualities

Qualities so acceptable and endearing, cannot fail to render them in general supremely agreeable and prepossessing, and to cover a multitude of those failings and deficiencies that are interspersed in some parts of their character, like weeds over a beautiful garden.

F I N I S .



